"MOMMIE DEAREST"

by

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Based on the book

"Mommie Dearest"

by

Christina Crawford

Return to Script Department
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MOMMIE DEAREST

BEGIN CREDITS.

INT. L.B. MAYER'S OFFICE - DAY

The CAMERA is HIGH UP, a shot from the ceiling down on the vast wood-panelled office of the most powerful man in Hollywood. L.B. MAYER is impeccably groomed, a short man who sits behind a desk that is so big it more than compensates for his lack of height. For good measure, the desk is also on a raised platform. He is tipped back in a throne-like chair. Sitting across from him, on the edge of her chair, is a lovely young woman with huge dark eyes. The CAMERA DESCENDS and MOVES IN CLOSER ON her wide-eyed expression. She is transfixed by being in the presence of Mayer. As the CAMERA COMES IN CLOSE and HOLDS ON BILLIE, we hear Mayer's voice, the voice of a man who chooses words carefully and is accustomed to having them accepted as gospel.

MAYER (V.O.)
Star quality.

Billie's eyes widen even further. Adrenaline accentuates her strong cheekbones and piercing eyes.

MAYER (V.O.)
(continuing)
You just might have it. Of course
I might be wrong...

Billie's expression dampens slightly.

ANGLE ON L.B. MAYER

sitting up straight, smirking.

MAYER
... but that's never happened.
Stand up and walk over to me.

BACK TO SCENE

Billie stands up cautiously, clutching her clutch purse tightly. She looks at him nervously, unsure what's coming next. Mayer stands up, thrusts out his chest, holds his chin high, by way of illustration.

MAYER
(continuing)
Self-assurance and poise. It takes
more than just big black eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Billie is mobilized by his comment. She walks proudly around his desk, her chest thrust forward and her chin up. He smirks at her, nodding to himself. He has goaded her just as he intended to. She stops when she gets to the edge of the platform, unsure what to do next. Mayer eyes her slowly, appreciatively, up and down her shapely legs and full bosom. His inspection makes her nervous again.

MAYER
(continuing)
I think you've got a future, young lady.

Mayer steps down off the platform, puts his arm around Billie. He cops a feel of her bosom on the far side. She looks straight ahead, her eyes darting down to his hand as he walks her to the door.

MAYER
(continuing)
I'm going to hand you over to our publicity department right now. We'll start a photo session and go from there.

Mayer stops, goes back towards his desk. Billie instinctively presses her arm, elbow bent and hand at her throat, against the breast he copped a feel of. She is a wide-eyed innocent who is determined to make it, no matter what the indignities.

BILLIE
Thank you so much, Mr. Mayer. I'm really grateful to you for this break and...

Mayer comes back with a typewritten list, which he thrusts into Billie's hand, interrupting her.

MAYER
For starters we have to find a new name for you. Pick one.
(beat)
Then I'll know what to call you.

Billie looks at him with gratitude laced with caution. She doesn't know just what he means but she wants to please.

BILLIE
Could you pick one for me, Mr. Mayer?

CONTINUED:

He takes the list back, peruses it. He studies the names, looks up carefully at Billie, then back down. He nods to himself.

MAYER
Your name is Joan Crawford. Don't
forget it.

Billie lets the words sink in, closing her eyes for a minute until he takes his hand off her head. When she opens her eyes they seem bigger and brighter than ever. Her nervousness is replaced by girlish enthusiasm and excitement.

BILLIE
Oh thank you, Mr. Mayer.

She impulsively gives him a kiss on the cheek, then darts out of the office, overcome by emotion and embarrassment.

EXT. STREET ACROSS FROM MGM - DAY

Billie and BOB are walking down the street eating ice cream cones. Bob is in his mid-twenties, like Billie. He is a gay guy, but not an effeminate one. He is high-energy but methodical, not impulsive. He gestures towards the main building of the studio across the street, with its wide stone steps.

BOB
Every great star in the business
has come sweeping up to those
steps in a limo. I'm going to
make you so big they're going to
bring those steps to you.

Bob takes the ice cream out of Billie's hand just as she's about to take a lick.

BOB
(continuing)
And you can kiss this stuff
goodbye: ten pounds lighter and
those cheeks will cave in. We'll
get twice the impact out of your
eyes.

Billie looks longingly at her ice cream cone, and at Bob, who takes a lick of hers and his. She looks down at his middle, where there is a slight tummy. Bob looks down at his stomach, then looks to the curb for a wastebasket.

CONTINUED:

There is only a mailbox. He opens the slot and dumps in the two cones. Billie looks behind them down the street, to see if anyone has seen this transgression. Bob is so wrapped up in his plans for her that he barrels ahead, oblivious.

BOB
(continuing)
I'm going to get you on the cover
of every magazine in this country.
There's never been anyone like you.
(beat)
Even if there has, it doesn't
matter. I'll make them think there
hasn't. Because you know what
publicity is?

Billie shakes her head, hanging on his every word as they continue walking.

BOB
(continuing)
Supply and demand. You create a
demand for the supply you've already
got. Hype and hard work. And you
know why I'm going to do it: for
me. You're going to be my star.

They approach a small church and Billie stops.

BILLIE
I'll be right out.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Billie is in the second pew. The multi-colored light from a stained-glass window behind the altar floods the church. It is totally quiet and deserted. Billie's hands are clasped together and she is down on her knees. She raises her head from a bowed position and looks up with intense longing, a beseeching look.

BILLIE'S POV OF THE CRUCIFIX

CLOSEUP ON the face of the Christ figure, which is done in an elongated, almost Modigliani style, not realistic. But it has eyes, which "look" down at Billie.

REVERSE SHOT - CLOSE UP - BILLIE'S FACE

The POV of the Christ statue. A rosy, glowing light bathes Billie's face from the glass window. She smiles, the hint of tears in her eyes. She believes He has heard her prayers and that her dreams will come true.

Billie stands up, genuflects as she reaches the main aisle, then walks with peaceful composure to the back of the church. Bob is waiting for her in the semi-darkness.

BOB
Ready to go, Billie?

CLOSEUP ON her radiant face, which reflects the inner peace she has just found in prayer. Her tone is almost defiant and she says each word slowly, carefully, proudly:

JOAN
My name is Joan.

END CREDITS.

MONTAGE OF PUBLICITY STILLS

A series of still photographs of Joan in a wide variety of outfits and in various "action" poses. The following conversation takes place during the photo session, although we SEE only the printed proofs and hear Joan and Bob's voices.

JOAN (V.O.)
I want him. And I'm going to get him.

BOB (V.O.)
Not if his mother has anything to say about it. Only the creme-de-la-creme gets through the door at Pickfair.

JOAN (V.O.)
He'll forget he ever had a mother once I get a chance with that gorgeous boy.

BOB (V.O.)
(taunting)
True love, eh? All that money and power have nothing to do with it?

CONTINUED:

JOAN (V.O.)
(Southern belle accent)
Why sugar! I thought that's what true love grew from.
(her regular voice)
Just get him to the wrap party, Bob.

BOB (V.O.)
Mary Pickford will have me arrested as an accessory.

FREEZE FRAME on a still of Joan in a low-cut, clinging dance dress, her head thrown back and hair flying out behind her in the middle of dancing.

The photograph "comes alive" and the CAMERA IS CLOSE UP ON Joan, who is dancing to beat the band, which is playing a fast, jazzy song that shows off her energetic, high-stepping dance style. The CAMERA PULLS BACK and we are --

INT. DANCE HALL - NIGHT

A huge room designed in art nouveau style; architectural details are flowing, rounded lines; colors are the sophisticated pastels of that period. The back wall of the dance hall has painted panels depicting flower-garlanded women and their aristocratic escorts at an elegant ball. The huge crowd in this dance hall is more down-to-earth. They glisten with the exertion of nonstop, energetic, leg-kicking dances. The BAND has just begun this number and the couples are just getting into the swing of it, but they are already making room at the center of the dance floor for Joan Crawford, who is dancing with total abandon. Several couples stop their own dancing and stand back to admire Joan's high-energy style. The CAMERA PULLS BACK to INCLUDE the tables surrounding the dance floor, where people are drinking. At various tables throughout the room, people stand on chairs to get a view of what is causing so much attention on the dance floor. One slightly drunken fellow stands up on a table to get an even better view.

HIS POV OF JOAN

She and her partner have been given even wider berth and are surrounded by a ring of admirers. Joan is totally absorbed in her dance steps and becomes increasingly uninhibited as the growing crowd's WHISTLES and HOOTS cheer her on.

ANGLE ON BOB AND DOUGLAS

standing on chairs in a roped-off section of tables near the entrance to the dance hall. There are potted palms ringing a group of twenty tables, for the wrap party to celebrate the finish of Joan's latest movie.

DOUGLAS is nattily dressed, with a white cashmere scarf draped over the shoulders of his suit. Unlike other men standing up on chairs and hooting as though at a ball-game, Douglas is suave and debonair. He watches Joan as though he was in the royal box at the ballet.

BOB
She's going to be a huge star.

ANGLE ON DOUGLAS

appraising Joan. He can't take his eyes off her. He nods, very slowly, in response to Bob's comment.

ANGLE ON JOAN

who looks up from her dancing to meet Douglas' eyes, which she has felt on her in the midst of it all. She gives him a sexy smile and executes a high kick in his direction. HOOTS and CHEERS break out.

ANGLE ON DOUGLAS

who smiles back at her. It is an effort to maintain his cool composure.

The MUSIC STOPS and Joan ends her dancing with a flourish.

CLOSEUP - JOAN

as we HEAR APPLAUSE and WHISTLES from the huge crowd. Joan's eyes are shining with the thrill of dancing and the excitement of being the queen of the ballroom. She looks up across the room at Douglas again and gives him a big smile. She reaches out her hand towards him, palm up, asking for his hand for the next dance.

ANGLE ON DOUGLAS

who extends his hand with 19th century flourish, accepting her invitation and extending his own. The CAMERA PULLS BACK and we SEE there is a huge throng of people jam-packed in the distance from the dance floor to Douglas' table.

CONTINUED:

Joan tries to get through the crowd, still holding her hand out to Douglas as though they were about to start a minuet. She can't make much headway so she turns to several men who are riveted on her.

JOAN
Come on, fellas, give me a lift.

The young men jump at the opportunity and hoist Joan onto their shoulders like a homecoming queen. They carry her towards Douglas, who still stands on his chair, his hand still extended towards her, palm open, as is Joan's. As Joan is transported on the men's shoulders towards Douglas, SOFT ROMANTIC MUSIC begins to play and we --

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON JOAN AND DOUGLAS

dancing a slow number together. Dimmed lights. He is a smooth dancer and Joan follows his steps as though they have been partners forever. Their bodies are not quite touching. They look into each other's eyes, smiling, saying nothing. Douglas twirls Joan, gliding her across the floor.

MED. SHOT - THEM DANCING

Joan moves her body in closer to Douglas' so that it is touching his. CLOSE ON Douglas' face, pleasantly surprised. Joan smiles back seductively. Joan gently takes her hand out of Douglas' as they continue dancing and she runs her finger lightly over his lips, an erotic caress. When Joan puts her hand back into Douglas' we SEE that his hand has remained outstretched even without hers in it. He has fallen under her spell. As Joan puts her hand back into his, she moves her body even closer against his, pressing herself against him and bringing their hands in close to them, bent at the elbow. Douglas' dancing steps have slowed down perceptibly. He is finding it hard to concentrate. Joan licks her lips as she looks up at Douglas with dreamy eyes. Douglas' expression becomes even more mesmerized; his eyes widen slightly with pleasure. The CAMERA PULLS BACK enough to SHOW us that Joan is very discreetly moving her pelvis close up against Douglas' groin, in the crush of dancers all around them. Joan tilts her head back slightly and lets her lips part as she looks longingly into Douglas' eyes. Then she lets her eyes close. Her pelvis is still performing its magic.

CONTINUED:

Douglas bends down and kisses Joan's lips. After a beat Joan opens one eye. Douglas' eyes are closed and he is totally absorbed in his lust. Joan closes her eye again with a faint triumphant smirk.

INT. PICKFAIR DINING ROOM - DAY

The CAMERA is HIGH above the enormous, opulent blue and white dining room, the same high ceiling SHOT as in L.B. Mayer's office at the opening of the film. Joan is just as dwarfed and overwhelmed here as she was there. It is the conclusion of a formal luncheon and a dessert mousse has just been served. MARY PICKFORD is the reigning queen at the head of the table. There is a white-whiskered retired Colonel to her right, then Joan, then a FOPPISH FELLOW in a white suit. He is talking to the ELEGANT LADY to his right, who has a British accent and masses of gold chain cascading down her front.

FOPPISH FELLOW
If it weren't for all those bothersome natives, I'd go to Barbados more often.

ELEGANT LADY
My dear, one must just view them as part of the landscape, like the tropical vegetation.

ANGLE ON JOAN

who watches her mother-in-law, Mary Pickford, out of the corner of her eye. Mary is talking to a PORTLY MAN on her left and at the same time taking a sip of water from a crystal glass. Mary's pinky is not touching the glass, but is daintily crooked. As Mary talks, Joan picks up her water glass and imitates the way Mary is holding it. Joan is painfully shy and excluded from the animated chatter and laughter going on around her.

MARY PICKFORD
It's a question of standards, I think, Joseph. Upholding them at all costs.

JOSEPH
I'll drink to that.

Joseph raises his wine glass to Mary, takes a sip. Mary picks up her dessert fork and spoon when she sees that the last guest has received his dessert.

CONTINUED:

Joan darts her eyes to Mary's hands, and then glances over to her right to see what other guests are doing. The Foppish Fellow and Elegant Lady both pick up their dessert fork and spoon and dig into their dessert. Joseph puts a big spoonful of dessert in his mouth, continues talking to Mary as Joan cautiously picks up her cutlery.

JOSEPH
(continuing)
At the next polo match I'll
propose a new rule. Consider
it done.

Joan's fork drops to the floor with a CLATTER onto the polished parquet. Joan is stricken with embarrassment. Mary's eyes dart over to Joan reprimandingly. Joan sits terribly still, then begins to bend over and reach out her left hand to retrieve the fork, which has fallen between her chair and the next. We SEE the wedding band on Joan's hand, which freezes when Joan sees Mary's index finger raised at the edge of the table. It is going back and forth like a pendulum, indicating "no, no, no." Joan sits back up straight, blushing miserably, looking at her mother-in-law's stern face. A uniformed servant appears instantly at Joan's side, placing a fresh fork beside her plate.

JOAN'S POV - DOUGLAS

at the far end of the table, the opposite side from her. He is engaged in a smiling, animated discussion with a perfectly-manicured blonde young WASP woman, who looks as though she's never dropped a fork in her life.

Joan looks unhappily down at her plate.

ANGLE ON MARY

rising from the table. She folds her napkin loosely as she stands up. Joan watches her every move and mimics it with her own napkin. Joan looks up at the other guests, who seem to rise in unison on a signal she didn't get. A slight beat late, Joan stands up too.

MARY PICKFORD
Coffee will be served on the patio
for those who wish, and then you
can do penance for that rich
dessert with a heated game of
croquet or badminton.

CONTINUED:

Guests start to move towards the French doors, which lead onto a flower-bordered patio with a canvas awning. Beyond it is a sweeping green lawn with croquet wickets, a badminton net and, behind them, a tennis court.

ELEGANT LADY
It was a divine lunch, Mary darling. I'm sure Versailles was never as heavenly as Pickfair.

MARY PICKFORD
You're very sweet, but I wouldn't say...

Joan has started to follow the group towards the patio. She is trying to get to her husband, Douglas, who has his arm around an older man. Mary breaks off what she is saying to the Elegant Lady.

MARY PICKFORD
(continuing; commanding)
Joan dear.

Joan stops in her tracks and turns towards Mary. She is nervous, dreading whatever reproach will come next.

MARY PICKFORD
(continuing)
You will take coffee with me in the library.

Joan follows obediently as Mary walks out of the dining room.

INT. PICKFAIR LIBRARY - DAY

Mary and Joan sit on opposite ends of a long leather couch. The room has beautifully-crafted inset wooden bookshelves, lined with leather-bound books and interspersed with art objects. Joan sits timidly with her coffee cup on her knee, mimicking Mary. Joan is intimidated by the rich surroundings: antique drop-leaf tables, a jewel-colored Oriental carpet, framed silver photos, and eighteen-foot-high windows draped in heavy brocade, looking out on the manicured gardens outside. Joan looks longingly out at the guests as they play lawn games. Joan looks nervously over at Mary, who has been studying her critically. There is a beat, as Mary inspects Joan. Joan drops her gaze, embarrassed by the scrutiny.

MARY PICKFORD
Douglas is looking a bit thin. But then he was always a fussy eater.

CONTINUED:

Joan says nothing, afraid to displease this domineering woman. Mary looks over at her again, as though judging a dog in a show. She speaks as though to herself.

MARY PICKFORD
(continuing)
Perhaps it's your hair that needs fixing...?

Joan puts her hand instinctively up to her hair, self-conscious. Mary heaves a polite sigh and looks out at the other guests. She takes a sip of her coffee, placing the cup carefully on the coffee table. She stands up. Joan starts to stand up too, nearly upsetting the coffee cup off her lap. She places it hastily on the table, rattling the cup and saucer, and further rattling her own nerves. She straightens up and faces her mother-in-law with a meek smile.

MARY PICKFORD
(continuing)
It's time for my nap now.

Mary walks imperiously to the door of the library, then turns to Joan.

MARY PICKFORD
(continuing)
I shall see you here when I come down.

Mary leaves.

Joan sits back down and folds her hands in her lap. Her expression is one of total misery, trapped. She closes her eyes and a few tears trickle out between the closed lids.

INT. BULLOCKS WILSHIRE - ANOTHER DAY

Joan is a year or two older and much more self-assured. She has matured. ADA, Joan's fan-turned-secretary, walks with her. Ada acts like a solicitous younger sister, utterly devoted and accepting. The two women pass the china department, where there is a formal place-setting displayed on a fully-set round dinner table. Joan stops, studies the table with concentration. She recites aloud, memorizing for herself.

JOAN
You start from the outside in: so that's the soup spoon, that's the salad fork, that's for the main course and those...

CONTINUED:

Joan reaches to pick up a small fruit knife and fork above the service plate. There is a small sign, "Do Not Touch Display." A SALESLADY strides over with a cold, reprimanding tone.

SALESLADY
May I help you ladies?

Joan quickly replaces the silverware self-consciously.

JOAN
Uh no... just looking.

SALESLADY
We'd appreciate if you would just look.

Joan shoots the lady an angry glance, but is too humiliated to say anything. She and Ada walk towards the furniture department.

JOAN
That bitch.

Joan's attention turns to a white sofa, which she sits down on, testing its comfort.

JOAN
(continuing)
This is perfect, Ada, I don't want one damn thing to remind me of that hellhole Pickfair.
(beat)
Light! Maybe I'll do the new house all in whites, none of that gloom, dusty antique crap. She can have her precious boy and her goddammed furniture back, and good riddance! Isn't this grand, starting a new life? Make a note, Ada, for Bob to book me some interviews about divorce. How dandy it can be!

Joan holds out her hand to Ada with a smile. Ada offers her hand to help Joan up off the sofa.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - MANY MONTHS LATER

A movie in the middle of shooting, between takes, crew and extras milling around. L.B. Mayer is off to the side, chewing out Bob, nearly shouting.

CONTINUED:

MAYER
We're in the middle of a fuckin'
movie, what do you mean, she
'can't dance'?!

BOB
The doctor said it might be a
hairline fracture.

MAYER
Since when is he calling the shots
around here, after eight years on
the payroll?

BOB
She's hurt, Mr. Mayer, and I guess...

MAYER
I don't need guessing. It's
costing me $10,000 to stand around
while 'The Star' jerks us all off.
Take me to her dressing room.

Bob leads the way off the set, behind some flats.

INT. JOAN'S SET DRESSING ROOM

L.B. Mayer's manner becomes instantly low-key, a soothing voice. He enters and goes right over to Joan, who is propped back on a sofa as the DOCTOR finishes bandaging her leg. His manner is Big Daddy.

MAYER
Joan, sweetheart. They tell me
you're hurt, honey.

L.B. Mayer touches Joan's cheek lovingly, all sympathy. Joan nods bravely through her pain.

Mayer gives the Doctor a piercing, questioning look when the Doctor straightens up. The Doctor gives him back a look that says, "Doesn't look real good." L.B. gives him a freezing stare in return. The Doctor is forced to say something, but is hesitant, intimidated.

DOCTOR
I'll have to do X-rays, Mr. Mayer,
but it looks like Miss Crawford
cannot dance.

L.B. Mayer takes a cigar out of his inside breast pocket, clips off the end of the cigar with a gold clipper that has a horse head on the other end.

CONTINUED:

Silence in the dressing room. Ada stands behind Joan, a hand on her shoulder. Joan's makeup man, hairdresser, and her wardrobe lady, MARY, attend to small duties but are listening avidly. Mayer gets the full dramatic mileage out of his cigar-lighting. He shakes his head sadly side-to-side, with an expression of, "Gee, this is hard luck, isn't it, fellas?" He holds up the cigar clipper to Bob and talks to him in a confidential manner, as though he doesn't mean for Joan to hear, although he intends for her to.

MAYER
(stage whisper)
I own race horses, you know, and when a great thoroughbred goes lame, it's a terrible thing.

Mayer pauses, twirling the cigar around slowly above the flame of a wooden match. He finishes lighting his Cuban cigar evenly, takes it out of his mouth and inspects the lit end of it.

MAYER
(continuing; stage whisper)
Sometimes you've got to put them down, it's such a terrible pity.

ANGLE ON JOAN

who sits up straight on the couch. She sets her jaw, with a tough expression. Ada's fingers grip tightly on Joan's shoulder, as though to protect her from herself, or from Mayer. Joan pulls away from Ada's hand and puts on a fabricated smile.

JOAN
You know, Doc, I think I'm ready to go back on the set.

DOCTOR
But, Miss Crawford, I couldn't sanction that. You can't dance.

JOAN
I can try.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - IMMEDIATELY AFTERWARDS

WALTZ MUSIC is playing and a ballroom dance scene is in full swing, dozens of extras twirling past Joan and her leading man, who are dominating the dance floor.

CONTINUED:

Several couples stand aside, admiring Joan and her dapper partner as they glide gracefully.

ANGLE ON SEVERAL CREW MEMBERS

who stand around the perimeter of the shot, all eyes riveted admiringly on Crawford.

ANGLE ON BOB

standing next to Ada, both of them with tense expressions.

BOB'S POV OF L.B. MAYER

who watches from the opposite side of the set. Mayer puffs a few times on his cigar, looking contented. Then he turns and walks quietly away from the scene. After several paces, three business-suited lackeys follow after Mayer, five paces behind him, the king and his court.

INT. JOAN'S SET DRESSING ROOM

Joan is at the sink, washing her hands with intense concentration. She works up a thick lather and rubs her hands together vigorously. She rinses them off, with determined thoroughness. Favoring her bad foot she sinks into the chair in front of the makeup mirror. Instantly, her various attendants go to work on her: The Doctor starts to re-bandage her ankle, the hairdresser begins undoing her fancy period hairdo, the makeup man starts to remove her heavy makeup. Joan reaches for a gardenia, which is one of several floating in water on her dressing table. She sniffs it, closes her eyes pleasurably, opens them and looks at the flower. Her expression hardens. It looks perfectly nice, but apparently not to her.

JOAN
Ada! Get me a fresh one.

Ada hurries to the refrigerator, opens it and removes a gardenia from a shelf full of them. Joan turns to Bob. She is livid.

JOAN
(continuing)
The way that bastard treats me I
might as well still be in the chorus
line.

CONTINUED:

BOB
Only someone who can be a star could have pulled that off. Mayer knows it, too.

JOAN
What in the hell is the point of being a star if they can still push you around like that? All I am to that shit heel is a puppet on a string. I can't stand it!

Both the hairdresser and the makeup man step backwards, driven from their tasks by Joan's outburst. She calms down and smiles apologetically at each of them. They smile back at her. They understand and sympathize. A beat, then they go back to work on her. Joan looks drained. Bob comes over with pep-talk earnestness.

BOB
You can make him your puppet, Joan.

Joan's eyes brighten. She swivels and turns her attention fully on Bob.

BOB
(continuing)
We've just got to make sure that your movies sell through the roof and he'll have to come crawling.

Joan breaks into a smile, her gloom dispelled by Bob's enthusiasm. She stands up, favoring her newly-bandaged ankle, and hobbles to the sink. She starts to wash her hands again, with as much lathering and scrubbing as a few moments earlier. The makeup man and hairdresser exchange a puzzled look at her odd behavior, but she is oblivious. She is enthused with Bob's solution.

JOAN
On his belly!

BOB
Have you noticed how people walk five paces behind him? That's the kind of power we've got to build for you.

Joan dries her hands, sticks her hand out to Bob. He puts his hand out and she shakes it like an overeager politician, her eyes gleaming.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CHICAGO HOTEL SUITE - SEVERAL YEARS LATER

Joan opens the door and walks into her suite, dog-tired and in a foul humor. Ada follows behind her, carrying newspapers that proclaim the opening of Joan's newest film. Ada gives Joan wide berth, knowing that is the only thing to do when Joan is like this. Joan kicks off her shoes as she walks into the suite, going right past the masses of flowers and fruit baskets that overwhelm the room. Joan throws her purse down on the couch as she passes it, begins unbuttoning her blouse as she continues into the bedroom. She gestures at the flowers.

JOAN
Get rid of that shit. Send it to
a hospital or something.

ANGLE ON ADA

staring after Joan. Ada is worried and insecure around Joan when she behaves like this.

INT. HOTEL BEDROOM

Joan lets her jacket drop to the floor, goes straight for the bar set up on a table. She twists off the top of the Smirnoff 100-proof vodka and throws the top on the floor as she pours herself a tall glass over ice. She is wiped out and angry with the world. She takes a long swallow of the drink and looks more relaxed. She takes another long swallow and puts the drink down. There is a bowl of floating gardenias on the table, which she scowls at. She picks up several of the flowers, which are slightly wilted. She splashes them back down into the bowl, spilling water all over.

JOAN
(calling out to Ada)
These gardenias are rotting! Fresh
twice a day, you know that!

Joan goes to the sink, scrubs her hands with intense concentration, talking to herself.

JOAN
(continuing)
Work like a dog and have to put up
with fucking incompetents.

Joan looks at her face as she dries her hands. She observes herself for a beat. She likes what she sees. The PHONE RINGS. Joan's fury returns.

CONTINUED:

JOAN
(continuing; to
herself, fiercely)
No!

Joan goes back into the bedroom, continues to undress, cocking her ear to hear what Ada is saying into the phone, but she is speaking too softly to overhear. Joan throws her blouse on the bed, unzips her skirt and lets it drop on the floor, then steps out of it, going to the table for her drink. She hears Ada hang up.

JOAN
(continuing; calling
out)
Who was that?
(changes her mind)
Never mind, I don't want to know.

Joan takes a drink, then plops down in the armchair, sighing and letting her body relax in total exhaustion. She closes her eyes, massages her temples. She calms down a little. With her head bent back in the chair, her eyes shut, Joan gropes for her vodka glass on the table beside her. She misses it, and knocks it over. At first she doesn't move in response. Then quietly, in utter resignation, she mutters to herself without budging.

JOAN
(continuing)
Goddamnit to hell.

With great effort, Joan sits up, then summons a last ounce of energy to stand up and make a new drink. She doesn't touch the spilled one. Ada comes in, tentatively.

ADA
Bath?

Joan nods, too tired to talk. Ada eyes Joan for a second, then slides by her and goes into the bathroom. The SOUND of WATER BEING RUN INTO A TUB. Joan opens a closet, looks for something she can't find. Her anger explodes again.

JOAN
(yelling)
Where's my robe, dammit?

Ada bolts out of the bathroom, opens a different closet and produces a bathrobe. She brings it over to Joan, holds it open to help her on with it. Joan is still furious.

CONTINUED:

JOAN
(continuing)
Nothing's ever where I want it, when I want it. Christ.

Joan stretches out on the bed with a big sigh. Ada goes back into the bathroom to check the bath water. The DOORBELL RINGS. Joan's eyes pop open and she shakes her head side to side on the pillow. Ada hurries through the bedroom, drying her hands as she goes, looking nervously at Joan as she runs past the bed.

INT. HOTEL LIVING ROOM

Ada opens the door and it's Bob. Ada lets out the breath she has been holding and smiles broadly at Bob, grateful for an ally.

BOB
How is she?

Ada rolls her eyes up to the ceiling, indicating "impossible."

BOB
(continuing)
Don't worry.

INT. HOTEL BEDROOM

Joan is still lying there, but turns her head to see who has come in. Her tone to Bob is angry but half-teasing.

JOAN
Oh it's you, you son-of-a-bitch. I don't want to hear one word about another interview, luncheon ... shit, I've really had it.

Bob waits for a beat. His silence piques her interest. She looks at him. He is smiling as though he's got a pleasant secret. She smiles back, cautiously.

JOAN
(continuing)
Whatever it is, no.

Bob smiles at her for another moment.

BOB
The Winnetka fan club, one of your biggest. They're downstairs.

CONTINUED:

Joan props herself up on her elbow and starts to get up. She blows up at Bob.

JOAN
Why the hell didn't you say so?

INT. HOTEL LIVING ROOM - A SHORT TIME LATER

Joan, fully dressed in a new outfit, opens the door to the suite. FOUR CHICAGO MATRONS, dressed in their Sunday best, greet Joan with the sort of smile they'd give a son returning from war. She is their idol. Three of them are speechless in her presence. MRS. MORGAN, their leader, is breathless with excitement. Joan greets them with gracious hospitality, genuinely delighted to see them.

JOAN
Ladies, please come in.

The three shy women enter tentatively, eyeing the masses of flowers in the luxurious suite.

MRS. MORGAN
I'm Sylvia Morgan, president of the Winnetka club. And these are the other officers -- Louise Hammerstein, Meg Davis and Betsy Fripps.

Joan shakes their hands with a smile that dispels some of their self-conscious bashfulness.

JOAN
It's lovely of you to have taken the time to come see me. I'm just terribly sorry I have so little time, with the new film opening.

MRS. MORGAN
Joan, we've seen it and you were great. The best ever. Wasn't she, girls?

The others all nod reverently and emphatically. Joan beams with pleasure.

JOAN
It's ladies like you who make it possible. I depend on you all.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. MORGAN
Well we're here to thank you for
all the pleasure you've given us,
and for being an inspiration to us.

She hands Joan an enormous bow-tied box. Joan unties it and opens and pulls out a four-foot-long hand-crocheted pink afghan that has the Lord's Prayer woven into it in black letters. Joan is so moved that she can't say anything at first.

MRS. MORGAN
(continuing)
All the girls in the fan club helped.

Joan is choked up with emotion. Tears are brimming.

JOAN
I don't know how I can thank you
all for your loyalty and love.

A beat as Joan looks admiringly at the afghan, then up at the worshipful faces of her visitors. Joan begins to speak but her voice cracks.

JOAN
(continuing)
I...

Joan hugs the afghan to her and looks at them, overcome with emotion.

JOAN
(continuing)
It makes it all worthwhile.

INT. TRAIN STATION - CHICAGO - DAY

LONG SHOT of Joan entering the huge old train station, which is packed with an enthusiastic crowd of her fans. A squadron of police holds back the crowd, parting it ahead of Joan as she walks through, waving like a queen to her devoted subjects. There is a space behind Joan; about five paces behind her retinue follows: Ada, Bob carrying a poodle, her hairdresser and a couple of unfamiliar faces. The sea of fans closes in behind the retinue as Joan marches forward with the cops running her offense. Joan reaches her train, which is adorned with a banner publicizing her recently-opened film. Joan stops at the train steps and the white-uniformed black train steward extends out his hand to help Joan aboard.

(CONTINUED)

She gives him her hand; their white gloves meet as he hoists her up on the step. She turns and waves at the cheering crowd, which is calling out her name. FLASHBULBS POP like fireworks as she waves regally to her fans and then enters the train.

INT. CHASEN'S - NIGHT

The red booths of the Hollywood restaurant are filled with glamorous bejeweled customers, all pleased with themselves just to be at Chasen's. Waiters scurry with heaping plates of food. The restaurant is buzzing with the sound of people full of food and drink. MR. CHASEN stands talking to a foursome in a booth near the door.

ANGLE ON THE BOOTH NEXT TO THEIRS

SHOWS a bowl of gardenias floating in the middle of the empty table. A perceptible hush comes over the room and all heads turn towards the door. Joan Crawford has made her entrance. She stands in the doorway, all in black with a diamond pin at her throat and a striking hat. She smiles a small, self-satisfied smile, knowing that she has captured everyone's attention. Mr. Chasen hurries over to the door.

ANGLE ON JOAN'S VERY HANDSOME ESCORT, TERRENCE

who steps from behind her and tries to come stand beside her. Crawford gives him a jab with her elbow. She camouflages her jab by changing the position of her clutch bag under her arm. She maintains her public smile but has a severe tone.

JOAN
(whispering)
Behind me, you idiot.

Joan smiles at Mr. Chasen as he reaches her. She takes a sniff of the gardenia she carries.

MR. CHASEN
Miss Crawford, such a pleasure.
May I seat you?

Joan nods, lets him walk several feet ahead of her so that he doesn't block people's view of her. Waiters and captains she passes either bow slightly from the waist or just bob their heads deferentially. Joan walks past a table of six diners, all of whom are riveted on her.

CONTINUED:

MAN AT TABLE
You look terrific, Joan.

Joan smiles at this stranger, is wonderfully grand yet gracious.

JOAN
How kind, thank you.

Joan sweeps on, sliding into her booth as Mr. Chasen stands at attention. Terrence sits down. Joan looks out at the crowd, which is slowly returning to its own business. Joan gives Terrence a hard, reprimanding glance, then looks down at the folded napkin on her plate. Terrence quickly unfolds it and puts it on her lap, clearly a habitual practice. She smiles at him.

JOAN
(continuing)
I'm starved. That was quite a lot of 'exercise.'

Terrence is totally captivated by Joan. His affectionate intimacy puts her off, however, and increases her natural tendency to be humiliating to men.

TERRENCE
(soft, sincere)
It was incredible, just incredible. It's never been as good with anyone else. I'm so glad you're back.

Joan is matter-of-fact, impersonal in tone. She continues watching the room and the door throughout, seeing who's around, not making eye contact with Terrence.

JOAN
It's a relief to be back in my town, at my table.

ANGLE ON A GORGEOUS DARK-HAIRED FELLOW

several tables away, who is sitting with a woman and another couple. He notices Joan staring invitingly at him. He returns her gaze.

TERRENCE
I miss you so much when you're away. You're so special to me, Joan.

CONTINUED:

Joan ignores his comment. She takes a leather-bound small pad out of her purse. It has "J.C." monogrammed in gold, and a small gold pen attached. She starts to write something on the pad, looking up and making eye contact again with the gorgeous fellow. At the same time she is writing and looking at him, she delivers her line to Terrence in an offhanded, put-down tone.

JOAN
Don't start sounding like a
schoolboy, Terrence.

Joan signals to the waiter, who hurries over to the table. Joan nods her head over at the gorgeous fellow and hands the waiter the note. The waiter nods and starts towards the other table. He stops and turns when Joan speaks.

JOAN
(continuing)
And then we'll have a nice steak.

EXT. CRAWFORD HOUSE - NIGHT

Joan and Terrence pull up to her house, which is a huge white mansion with black trim on the doors and shutters. There is a balcony running around the second floor that spills ivy and bougainvillea. The driver jumps out and hurries around to Joan's door, which he opens. Joan gets out, Terrence starts to follow her out but she reaches back into the car and puts her hand on his shoulder. He stops in the middle of his exiting motion. Joan is cool and firm.

JOAN
(to Terrence)
Good night, Terrence.
(to the driver)
You may take him home now.

Joan goes up the brick path to the front door. The SOUND of the CAR DOOR SLAMMING and the CAR DRIVING AWAY. Joan knocks on the door and the MAID opens it. She is wary of Joan, who walks right past her.

INT. CRAWFORD ENTRY HALL

It is polished parquet floor with large pots of cymbidium and other decorative plants in pots against the wall.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAID
Good evening, Miss Crawford.

Joan riffles through a pile of mail on the hall table, not even looking at the servant. Joan speaks to her in a cold, rude voice, the voice reserved for servants, children, and most of her escorts. A uniformed BUTLER comes into the entry hall and stands beside the Maid.

JOAN
Was all the downstairs furniture moved and vacuumed behind?

MAID
Yes, Miss Crawford.

JOAN
And where is Emmett, damn it?

EMMETT
I'm right here, Miss Crawford.

She turns and gives him a blistering stare. She had no need for him, it is just the house rule that they are to meet her at the door.

JOAN
Good.

She starts to go up the stairs but she stops dead in her tracks and glares down at the potted plants.

ANGLE TO SHOW THE MAID AND EMMETT

both stiffening in response to her. Joan pulls one of the plants away from the wall. There is an unwaxed circle where it had been. Joan turns on the Maid in a fury. This is a controlled rage.

JOAN
How many times do I have to say it?! Move everything when you clean.

MAID
(quaking)
But, Miss Crawford, I was afraid of scratching the...

JOAN
(interrupting, yelling)
You were afraid of a little sweat, you lazy bitch! When I give an order I don't expect talking back and disobedience.

CONTINUED:

She pulls another plant away from the wall, to illustrate her anger.

JOAN
(continuing)
What the hell do you think I pay
you for, just to loaf around here
all day and eat the food I work
my ass off to buy?

The Maid is in tears -- frightened yet indignant.

MAID
Don't talk to me like that,
I've been working all my life for...

JOAN
(screaming)
How dare you tell me how to talk?
You're fired, get out of my house!

The DOORBELL RINGS. Joan composes herself instantly. Joan waves her hand towards the door. The Maid opens it, cowed by Joan. The Handsome Young Man from the restaurant is on the other side of the door, smiling. He has Joan's note in his hand. With a wave of her hand, Joan dismisses the servants, who leave. Joan looks the fellow up and down.

JOAN
Well hello there.

Joan gives him a seductive, beckoning look. She starts towards the sweeping staircase. He follows her. As Joan reaches the fourth step she removes her hat with a flourish and tosses it nonchalantly over the banister. It floats, spinning, onto the antique hall bench. She takes another step up, then turns to the Young Man, who is two steps behind her.

JOAN
What did you say your name was?

EXT. BULLOCK'S WILSHIRE DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

A long Cadillac convertible pulls up in front of the store. Joan is driving. A HANDSOME SUITOR sits next to her, with a poodle in his arms. Bob sits by the window; Ada is in the back. The doorman opens Joan's door, and without a backward glance she strides to the front door. About five paces behind her, the retinue follows.

INT. BULLOCK'S

The CAMERA is HIGH UP, capturing the grandness of the store, a momument to art deco. There are angular motifs in the architectural detail and the fixtures. Joan strides into the store with a manner that assures she is noticed. Customers in the aisle between counters make room for her to pass, whispering and nudging each other as they recognize the star. She marches forward with her trail of companions behind. Joan stops at the china department, which has an elegantly set table displayed in the entrance to the department. Two SALESGIRLS have come to the entrance of their department to see what all the commotion is about. They grab each other's arms in excitement when they recognize Crawford. They watch Joan in awe, as Joan surveys the setting.

JOAN
Look, Bob, aren't these lovely?

Joan picks up a crystal glass that is right beside a "Do Not Touch" sign. The glass slips and breaks. The Salesgirls, rather than being angry, hurry to clear it up, to make sure Joan doesn't hurt herself. Joan is no longer the self-conscious girl of years before and handles herself with no loss of dignity.

JOAN
(continuing)
Oh dear.

SALESGIRL
Oh, Miss Crawford, I'm so sorry that happened. Please don't cut yourself.

The Salesgirl picks up the pieces of glass with a napkin and puts the pieces on a dinner plate. Her manner is deferent to Joan, as though Joan deserves the apology. Joan is calm.

JOAN
I'll pay for it, of course, just...

SALESGIRL
(interrupting)
Oh no, Miss Crawford, that's all right.

JOAN
Well then I'll take two dozen of them. Charge and send, would you dear?

SALESGIRL
Right away. Thank you, Miss Crawford.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Joan turns and continues down the aisle. The CAMERA is HIGH UP again. From ABOVE we can SEE that all transactions in the store have come to a standstill because of her presence. Customers and employees are flocking from everywhere to see Joan Crawford, telling others as they hurry along. As the CAMERA DESCENDS we can HEAR the AD LIBBED comments of the crowd. "It's Joan Crawford." "Joan Crawford??!" "Joan Crawford's here, that's what they said."

ANGLE ON THE MILLINERY COUNTER

Joan's manner is grand and theatrical, every inch the public person. She is friendly in a queenly way to the shop girls, who are in a tizzy about waiting on her, eager to please but too excited and nervous to have their minds on their work.

JOAN
Hello, Sara. What wonderful hats
have we got today?

The shop girls turn to the displays behind them. Joan steps behind the counter to help herself, as usual. She places one of the display hats on her head, then admires herself in the mirror. Two LADIES watch her avidly.

LADY #1
(whispering)
Isn't she stunning?

LADY #2
(whispering)
I'd give anything for an autograph,
but it isn't right to disturb her.

Joan twirls around dramatically and oozes charm to her fan. She picks up a pen from the counter.

JOAN
It would be my pleasure to give
you an autograph, madam.

The Lady is surprised that Joan has overheard and she doesn't respond instantly. Joan takes the piece of paper out of the Lady's hand and signs it with a flourish and a smile. Other people in the crowd around the counter hold out scraps of paper, their shopping bags, etc. Joan remains smiling and signs several of them. The fans AD LIB comments to her like "I loved you in your last movie," "You're my favorite star," "Thank you, Miss Crawford." Joan stops signing and turns back to the hats, always the patient but reigning queen.

CONTINUED:

Joan turns to model the hat for Bob. He's the only person with whom she kids around, lets her guard down, shows her sense of humor and warmth. She adjusts the brim of the hat, realizing it isn't quite right.

JOAN
(continuing)
What are we going to do about this hat, Bob?

BOB
Buy you a peachy little house in the Valley to go with it.

Joan laughs.

JOAN
You nasty little snob!

She puts on a bigger, more dramatic black hat with a veil, speaks to Ada as she adjusts it. Ada's pencil is always poised.

JOAN
(continuing)
Ada, are the place cards being done for Saturday's dinner?

ADA
All set, Joan. You'll just want to inspect the silver. Can we check Sunday's schedule? Manicure, pedicure and massage at eleven in the garden. Then your swim, half an hour dictation, lunch at one, then your siesta?

JOAN
That's lunch at 12:45, Ada.

Joan twirls in the hat, modelling it for Bob. He studies her with a slight frown.

JOAN
(continuing)
Don't look so serious, darling. I can stand the truth. It's only a hat.

Bob laughs, Joan joins in. She hands the hat back to the salesgirl.

CONTINUED:

JOAN
(continuing)
What other colors have we got it in, Sara?

SARA
Almost any color you'd like, Miss Crawford. It came in black, beige, brown, lavender...

JOAN
(interrupting)
One in every color, and send them please.
(she turns to Ada and Bob)
All right, second floor, shoes, next!

INT. STUDIO COMMISSARY - LUNCHTIME - ANOTHER DAY

Joan enters the commissary. The room is full of business-suited men at tables next to actors and extras in full costume and make-up: cowboys next to 18th century aristocrats, gangsters in silk suits next to Indians in full war dress. All heads turn to look at Joan, who enters in one of her smartly tailored suits. She walks to her table, with HAL following, a poodle in his arms. We can faintly hear people whispering, "It's Crawford," "Look, it's Joan Crawford." She creates a stir on her own turf just as she does in the outside world. Joan and Hal sit down at a booth that has a sign on it, "Reserved for Miss Crawford." Joan is in a brooding mood; her tone to Hal is plaintive anger. Joan has a script in a leather binder. She puts it on the table, then slaps her hand on it.

JOAN
Garbage! I'm fed up doing crap!

HAL
Hang in there, honey. The next one will be better.

JOAN
I don't need you telling me the same line of horseshit they do.

Joan gestures toward a booth across the room that has a sign on it that says, "Reserved for Miss Sandstone."

CONTINUED:

JOAN
(continuing)
All I get are Sheila Fucking Sandstone's rejects, the shit she won't do. You're never in town when I need that extra push, Hal, some fire under Mayer's tail.

HAL
But, Joanie, L.B. loves you.

JOAN
That son of a bitch loves me so much he gives all the plums to Sandstone and I get four turkeys in a row, all her goddamn discards.

ANGLE ON THE ENTRANCE

to the commissary. L.B. Mayer walks in with a businessman. L.B. waves to Joan with a big smile as he goes to his booth. Joan waves, smiles a big, false smile and blows him a kiss. Hal nods his head at Mayer in greeting.

BACK TO SCENE

HAL
He believes in you: look how far you've come at MGM with him.

JOAN
Right into the garbage can. All the years I've been on this lot, all the millions I've made for them, and he takes me for granted.

Joan looks down at the table, takes a cracker from the basket and takes a small bite of it, brooding to herself.

JOAN
(continuing)
I feel like a wife who sticks around after even though her husband's cheating on her.
(beat; Joan looks up at Hal)
Where the hell else is she going to go?

EXT. CRAWFORD GARDEN - EVENING

Joan and Hal are taking a stroll in the softly lit rose garden. The winding gravel path is bordered by low-timmed shrubs. Carefully tended rose trees and rose bushes are in full bloom all around them. The tone between them is tender and soft. Joan has her arm linked through Hal's.

JOAN
I'm so glad you're back. God, I missed you.

HAL
I missed you too, baby.

Hal takes her in his arms and kisses her. He continues holding her.

JOAN
Promise me you won't go away for that long again.

HAL
What would happen to all those real estate syndications that give you a 200 percent return?

JOAN
I don't care about them, it's you I want. I can't stand it when you're gone.

HAL
(gently jealous)
I hear you manage pretty well without me.

JOAN
Oh, Hal, you know me...

She gives him a passionate kiss.

JOAN
(continuing)
Those guys mean nothing to me. You're the only one who matters.

She looks up at him with big, adoring eyes. She means what she says. Hal strokes her cheek gently, looking deeply into her eyes. He kisses her, a series of light kisses where their lips press together only lightly.

HAL
How did I ever get so lucky?

CONTINUED:

Joan smiles, her intense seriousness changes to lightness. This is a private line between them, a ritual.

JOAN
I'm the lucky one.

HAL
Let's not argue, let's go get some chow.

INT. CHASEN'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Joan, with Hal in tow, makes a great entrance as usual. She is wearing a simple, tight-fitting black dress with black beading on the collar, which is repeated on her hat and the cuffs of her black suede gloves. She is carrying a gardenia, which she sniffs as she stands watching Mr. Chasen hurry over to her. He is flustered, kisses her hand, flips through the reservation book.

MR. CHASEN
Miss Crawford, good evening. I'm so sorry, we must have made an error, we had written you down for tomorrow night.

Joan's smile freezes. She looks over at "her" booth. People are seated there. Mr. Chasen is a nervous wreck.

MR. CHASEN
(continuing)
Just give me a moment and we can move the people in your booth and...

JOAN
(interrupting)
I wouldn't dream of it, please. We'll be just as comfortable somewhere else.

MR. CHASEN
Thank you, Miss Crawford, Excuse me while I have another booth prepared.

Mr. Chasen scurries off, anxious to please, Joan's fake smile is on, but her tone to Hal is one of controlled fury.

JOAN
(whispering)
That was my fucking table, goddamit.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HAL
Why don't you say something, let
him...

Hal stops talking as Mr. Chasen returns. Joan gives him a big smile.

JOAN
And send a bottle of champagne to
the people in my booth.

Hal looks at Joan quizzically, unable to figure her out. He follows her and Mr. Chasen to the table. As soon as Hal sits down he immediately unfurls Joan's napkin and places it in her lap. This subservience to Joan seems contradictory, because Hal is a mensch, not a playtoy. A business-suited man, JERRY INGRAM, walks towards the table with a big grin. Joan is pleased, although he is a stranger.

JOAN
(under her breath
to Hal)
At least my fans can find me no
matter where they stick me.

Ingram reaches the table, pumps Hal's hand enthusiastically.

INGRAM
Hal, it's been too long.

HAL
I'd like you to meet Joan Crawford.
Jerry Ingram.

INGRAM
It's a pleasure, I've enjoyed all
your films.

Ingram turns back to Hal, in whom he is much more interested. He shakes Hal's hand again.

INGRAM
I'm going to give you a call, I've
got some interesting properties.

Ingram turns to go, realizes he's forgotten Joan. He turns, holds out his hand to her. A beat, as Joan gives him a piercing look, punishing him for forgetting her. Then she holds out her hand.

CONTINUED:

INGRAM
Nice meeting you.

Hal realizes she's pissed off. He smiles at her placatingly, to no avail. He signals a waiter.

HAL
(to waiter)
Two double vodkas.
(to Joan)
He's a bore, but just for the record he owns half of Palm Springs.

JOAN
I don't give a rat's ass. This is my place. What do you think I come here for, the food?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ENTRANCE OF CHASEN'S - A SHORT WHILE LATER

Joan and Hal are at the door. Mr. Chasen is bidding them farewell.

JOAN
As always, the food was superb, Mr. Chasen.

MR. CHASEN
It is always our pleasure to serve you, Miss Crawford.

Mr. Chasen turns back to the restaurant: a married couple is leaving. The MAN claps Hal on the back, they shake hands.

MAN
Hal, you're lookin' good. We should get together.

HAL
Sure thing, Jim.

The couple exits. Joan is glaring at Hal, furious that he is getting the attention. Hal offers her his arm. She takes it with a sneer.

JOAN
(sarcastic, angry)
Aren't we the popular one tonight?

EXT. CHASEN'S SIDEWALK

Joan and Hal stand by the curb, waiting for their car. They aren't speaking. Other customers wait off to the side for their cars. Joan looks back at the door to the restaurant and sees L.B. Mayer and another man come out. Joan smiles at L.B. Mayer while whispering to Hal. Mayer comes towards them.

JOAN
(whispering)
He's probably going to apologize for not giving me the part, the bastard.

MAYER
Joan Crawford, I'd like you to meet Sidney Clark.

He turns to Hal more enthusiastically.

MAYER
(continuing)
And this is Hal Markham, Sidney Clark.

The men shake hands. Mayer leans close to Hal, with a solicitous manner. Joan is being ignored.

MAYER
(continuing)
Hal, I can't thank you enough for solving that little problem.

HAL
Glad to be of help, L.B., anytime.

MAYER
And please let me know the fee.

HAL
No fee is necessary between friends. Consider it a favor.

Joan has been watching all this, furious at being excluded and especially furious at being brushed off by the head of her studio. It only makes it a greater insult that her escort is center stage.

JOAN
Charming how the mafia works. One big happy family.

CONTINUED:

Hal says nothing but stares at Joan with venom, an expression that would reduce another woman to tears. Crawford stares right back at him. There is a beat of tension. Something could explode between them. But a group of fans suddenly presses in, with AD LIBBED comments of "Can I have your autograph?" "You're the greatest, Joan." Joan turns her back on the men and gives her smiling attention to her fans, stepping over to them.

MAYER
(whispering to
Hal)
How can you put up with her? You,
of all guys?

A beat. Hal looks over at Joan. The fans are snapping pictures of her with flashbulbs; she is smiling and chatting with them. Hal looks back at Mayer. His voice is low and powerful.

HAL
Because she's the greatest fuck
that ever lived.

INT. JOAN'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Joan and Hal are in a high-decibel argument.

HAL
There's a lot I'll put up with --
Errol and Tyrone call me a geek for
carrying your poodle and knitting.
I don't give a damn, but when you...

JOAN
(interrupting,
yelling)
Two stupid jerks call you names so
you've got to take it out on me,
suddenly it's a goddamn burden to...

HAL
(interrupting,
loudly)
Hold on! I'll unfold your napkin.
You're my lady and whatever makes
you happy, fine. But don't you
ever talk to me like that again.

Joan flings herself at Hal, managing to slug him a few times before he pins her arms back. She is wild with rage.

CONTINUED:

JOAN
(yelling)
Don't you ever tell me what 'never' to do, you son of a bitch.

Hal tosses Joan down onto the bed and picks up his jacket.

HAL
This is ridiculous. I'm going home.

This calms Joan down immediately. She becomes soft and seductive.

JOAN
Oh, Hal, come on.

Hal turns around, burning mad. He means to leave but Joan's shift to being coy and sweet throws him off guard. He stands across the room, staring at her propped on her elbow on the bed. His expression is one of challenge: he could go either way, it depends on how she handles it. Joan pats the bed invitingly.

JOAN
(continuing)
Come on, honey.

There is a beat. Hal doesn't come towards her, but neither does he continue out the door. Joan is a pussy cat. Her voice is like honey.

JOAN
(continuing)
You know I didn't mean it.

Hal walks slowly over to her. She smiles. He is still tentative.

HAL
Didn't mean what you said just now, or in front of Mayer?

Hal is standing above her at the bed. She shrugs with a coy, seductive smile. She doens't care what she has to say.

JOAN
Either one.

A beat, Hal looks down at her, not totally convinced. Joan shrugs again girlishly, making light of the whole thing. She reaches out her hand.

CONTINUED:

JOAN
(continuing)
Either. Both. Any way you want it.

Hal gives her his hand, smiling down at her, won over. Joan pulls him playfully onto the bed. They roll together. Hal adopts Joan's soft, sexy tone of voice as he rolls on top of her.

HAL
Any way I want it?

Joan looks up at him with an intrigued expression that shows she is titillated by his double-entendre. She nods her head slowly up and down, with a wide-eyed trusting gaze. They kiss with determination.

INT. JOAN'S BEDROOM - DAWN

The room is dark. It is five a.m. and there are the isolated SOUNDS of a couple of BIRDS CHIRPING outside, where the sun has yet to come up. The ALARM RINGS and Joan shuts it off and turns on the bedside lamp. She lies there for another minute. Black eyeshades. An elastic chin strap circling her neck. A band holding her hair back from her face, which is covered with greasy cream. White cotton gloves that have the same cream inside. She looks like a refugee from a medieval torture chamber. She takes off the eyeshakes and cringes at the light. She gets up slowly, every bone of her body feeling that it is inhumanly early to be waking up. She begins her morning rituals, which she does with a clockwork precision, although still partially asleep. She grabs the bathrobe which is carefully laid out at the bottom of the bed and puts it on as she staggers to the bathroom, undoing the chin strap as she goes.

INT. BATHROOM

Joan is leaning over a sink full of steaming hot water, her face all lathered with sudsy cleansing cream. She splashes her face with the hot water three times, then lets the water out of the sink, She dabs at her face with a towel, then opens the thermos which is set out on the counter beside the sink. She breathes in the steamy aroma of the coffee inside with a grateful smile. She pours coffee into the mug on the counter, takes a sip, shuts her eyes in pleasure, sips again. Then with a sigh she opens the ice bucket on the counter and dumps ice into the big empty bowl beside it.

CONTINUED:

Then she picks up a glass pitcher of water and pours it over the ice. She bends over the bowl and splashes her face with the ice water, cringing slightly from the shock.

INT. DRESSING ROOM

Coffee mug in hand, Joan stands in front of an open closet door where there are a dozen sweat suits hanging in a row. She stands for a moment in front of them, unable to decide which color to wear. She bends over, her body still not fully awake, and picks out a pair of running shoes from the row of them beneath the jogging suits. She grabs a red sweat suit with the same hand and starts into the bedroom, her nose nuzzled inside her coffee mug, from which she then takes a sip.

EXT. STREET IN BRENTWOOD - EARLY MORNING

The sun is barely illuminating a lushly green, tree-lined street. A LONG SHOT of the peaceful street, with sleeping houses on either side. Elaborate landscaping fronts every house. A light fog hangs low to the ground.

The nose of a black limousine appears through the fog at the far end of the street. The CAMERA DOLLIES SLOWLY TOWARDS the car, which moves slowly TOWARDS the CAMERA. A person is jogging alongside the car. We can't see who is is from this distance, but it is the red sweatsuit that Crawford picked out earlier. As the car and the CAMERA COME CLOSER together we recognize Crawford, keeping pace with her car and driver in her monogrammed outfit.

The CAMERA ANGLE CHANGES to a TWO SHOT of Joan and the driver, who we can now SEE is Bob. They talk as she continues to run.

JOAN
This five a.m. shit only gets
tougher, even after all these year.
(beat)
And what he hell am I doing it for,
when Mayer keeps sticking me in
losers?
(beat)
I'm the biggest female star that
cocksucker's ever had and he's
burying me alive.

She gets angrier, runs faster, gets louder.

CONTINUED:

JOAN
(continuing)
He thinks he can push me around
like a trained dog, well fuck him!
I'm going to let him know that I've
been his good girl for long enough.
He can shove his lousy scripts!

INT. SOUND STAGE - DAY

Joan's VOICE OVERLAPS with the preceding scene. The anger is replaced by plaintiveness. Joan is in costume and makeup. She is sitting with L.B. Mayer off to the side of the set, which isn't being used at the moment. Joan is quietly fervent, pleading with Mayer who remains impassive, his cigar adding to his aloof posture.

JOAN
L.B., haven't I always done
everything you've wanted?

MAYER
You've been wonderful, sweetheart.

JOAN
I've given you my life, done a
good job for MGM, haven't I, L.B.?

MAYER
Sure, you've been great.

JOAN
Then what about the new picture?

A beat. Takes a long drag on his cigar, lets the smoke out slowly.

MAYER
What about it?

JOAN
Please, L.B., I want that part. I
need it.

Mayer doesn't respond. Joan looks at him beseechingly.

JOAN
(continuing)
Cut me and I bleed like anyone else.
Please help me, L.B.

CONTINUED:

MAYER

Joanie, let's concentrate on
finishing this picture. One thing
at a time.

Mayer's placating patronization only increases Joan's despair.

JOAN

What more do you want from me?
(beat)
Just level with me: am I going
to get the part or not?

Mayer stands up, considers whether to answer or not. He pats her on the arm and gives her a little smile.

MAYER

Not this time, Joan honey.

He walks away. She is left sitting there in dumbfounded shock.

INT. JOAN'S SET DRESSING ROOM - IMMEDIATELY AFTER

Joan pulls the door shut behind her, turning the lock. She stands staring at herself in the huge expanse of lightbulb-framed mirror. She takes a deep breath and lets it out, several times. The rage she swallowed on the set begins to surface. She picks up one of her ankle-strap shoes that is sitting on the counter. She attacks the lightbulbs around the mirror with the heel of the shoe, smashing each one with wild-eyed deliberation. They break with small explosions and pieces of glass flying everywhere. Her attack increases in speed and intensity as she goes down the row of lights, an evil smile on her face. She does not stop until she has smashed every bulb in the long row that runs across the top and down the sides of the mirror, flying glass everywhere. She is breathing hard as she finishes destroying the lightbulbs.

A KNOCK at the door. Joan freezes, calms herself. Her voice is controlled.

JOAN

Yes?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (V.O.)

We need you for Sheila's closeup,
Joan.

CONTINUED:

JOAN
I'll be there in a minute, Gary.

We hear his FOOTSTEPS retreating. Joan studies herself in the mirror. She pats her hair into place and leaves the dressing room, completely composed.

INT. SOUND STAGE - SHORTLY AFTERWARDS

The crew is just finishing getting up for SHEILA SANDSTONE's closeup. Joan sits in her chair to the side of the set, knitting rapidly. She looks up at Sandstone with an icy appraising stare. Sandstone returns an icy stare. The feud between these two rivals is well known. This is the first time they have co-starred; there is underlying tension on the set.

DIRECTOR
Can I have Joan on this side of
the camera for reactions? We're
ready to roll.

Joan carries her knitting to a stool set up right beside the camera. She sits down and continues knitting nonchalantly, the NEEDLES CLICKING together. A BELL RINGS, all talking and movement on the set stops.

ANGLE ON SHEILA

looking annoyed by the knitting needles. The Director doesn't notice.

DIRECTOR
We're rolling, please.

Sheila forces herself to tune out the knitting needles, takes a moment to pull herself into character, fighting for her concentration.

SHEILA
(in character)
'You're making a grave mistake,
dear girl.'

Joan says her lines, but with no feeling, in a monotone, giving Sandstone nothing to work off of. Crawford doesn't even look up, and continues knitting.

JOAN
'What do you mean, Cathy?'

CONTINUED:

SHEILA
(in character)
'You know very well...'
(she interrupts
herself)
Would you stop it with the
knitting needles, Joan, I can't
concentrate.

Joan raises her eyes with a malicious smirk. She stops knitting and just stares at Sheila for a long beat.

DIRECTOR
Okay, ladies, we're still rolling.
Take it from the top.

Sheila draws a breath, regains her composure, starts again.

SHEILA
(in character)
'You're making a grave mistake,
dear girl.'

JOAN
(in character)
'What do you mean, Cathy?'

Joan delivers the line with the same disinterest. Immediately afterwards starts knitting again. Sheila tries to stay in character but she explodes with anger. Joan remains cool, yet knife-edged.

SHEILA
Dammit, woman, stop that!

JOAN
Don't tell me what to do.

SHEILA
You're making it impossible for
me to work!

JOAN
Ah, but you've got connections who
always fix it so you can work,
Sheila dear.

DIRECTOR
Cut!

Everybody on the set remains perfectly still, even though the camera has stopped rolling. This is the showdown they've been awaiting.

CONTINUED:

DIRECTOR
(continuing;
harshly paternal)
Now come on, girls, we've got a movie to make.

SHEILA
Well I can't do it if she's driving me crazy with the knitting needles.

JOAN
You've only got two little lines, dear. I can't imagine a 'pro' couldn't manage them.

SHEILA
I think you'd be enough of a 'pro' not to try something so cheap as fouling up my closeup.

JOAN
You don't need my help for that.

DIRECTOR
(angry)
That's enough! Joan, you're through for the day. I'll give Sheila her lines.

Joan stands up with a self-satisfied smile, as though she has scored a victory. She smiles warmly at the Director as though they have a little secret between them about Sheila.

JOAN
Good night, Dick.

Joan strides off the set, chin held high.

INT. BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL BALLROOM - ANOTHER DAY

Joan stands in front of a crowd of REPORTERS at a press conference. She is wearing a well-tailored suit and matching hat and holds a gardenia. Spotlights are shining on her from various directions and flashbulbs POP throughout the scene. Joan knows the important reporters by name and manipulates them with a we're-all-friends charming attitude. We open on the SOUND of Joan's LAUGHTER, a gay, abandoned laughter, which dies down.

CONTINUED:

JOAN
Maury, really. All of you are determined to make trouble between Sheila Sandstone and myself. We love each other.

REPORTER #1
What about reports that you walked off the set and Sheila was in tears, at one point during filming?

JOAN
In tears? What a nasty thought, so unprofessional.
(a beat; Joan takes them into her confidence)
It must be the strain, getting to her.

All the reporters scribble on their pads. Joan suppresses a delighted smile and manages to look concerned.

LADY REPORTER
What about you, Joan? You've been making pictures back-to-back for years without a rest.

MALE REPORTER #2
You deserve a vacation, Joanie!

JOAN
(seductive charm)
Is that an invitation, Bernie?

The room explodes into applause and hooting. Male Reporter #2 reddens with embarrassment. AD LIBBED calls of "Atta boy, Bernie."

ANGLE ON JOAN

cool and smiling, on top of the world, all these people in the palm of her hand.

JOAN
Any more questions?

INT. CRAWFORD ENTRY HALL - ANOTHER AFTERNOON

Hal comes in the front door, having knocked and gotten no response. He enters tentatively.

CONTINUED:

HAL
(calling out)
Joan?

Hal advances into the entry hall, looks left and right, hears NOISE coming from the dining room. He heads that way.

HAL
(continuing;
calling)
Joan?

JOAN (V.O.)
In here, Hal!

INT. CRAWFORD DINING ROOM

Hal stops at the door to the dining room, which appears to be empty except for a bucket of water next to one of the chairs. Hal looks baffled, since Joan's voice came from in here. He is about to turn and leave when Joan sticks her head out from under the table. She has on rubber gloves and is holding a sponge. Hal looks shocked and baffled. Joan is in a chipper mood. Her tone is light and teasing.

JOAN
What's the matter, never seen a
star cleaning her own table?

HAL
Underneath?

Joan puts her head back under, answers while scrubbing, although we can't see her. Her tone is matter-of-fact.

JOAN (O.S.)
In case a guest drops a napkin
and looks up. I'd be so embarrassed
if it was dirty.

Hal nods his head slowly, as though he's responding to a person in a looney bin. He takes a breath, puts on a light tone.

HAL
Come on, Joan. We're going to be
late for the preview.

JOAN
I'll be upstairs by the time you
have our drinks ready.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SLIGHTLY LATER

Joan and Hal are laughing as they walk towards the stairs, carrying their empty highball glasses. Joan stops; her brow furrows.

JOAN
I just can't go out like this.

Joan indicates her very plain dress, little makeup, no hat.

HAL
You promised the theatre owner you'd
'dress down' to avoid a mob scene.

JOAN
At least I can put on full makeup.

INT. BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER

Joan walks out of her bedroom, Hal following closely behind, looking at his watch. Joan is perfectly made up. Halfway down the hall she stops short; Hal nearly collides with her. Without turning around, she says the next line.

JOAN
I can't do it: I've got to put
on a proper dress.

Hal nods, an expression of exasperated resignation.

INT. JOAN'S DRESSING ROOM - SHORTLY AFTERWARDS.

Joan is adjusting a sexy, glamorous dress, watching herself with a smile in the mirror. Hal looks at his watch again. Joan notices his impatience, continues looking at herself.

JOAN
Nearly ready.

Joan unpins her hair, which cascades around her shoulders. She fluffs it up, admiring herself again, then goes towards the door. She grabs a gardenia out of the bowl on her vanity table and looks at herself one more time. She gives Hal a light kiss on the head, delighted with herself, finally.

JOAN
(continuing)
Now, I'm Joan Crawford.

INT. CRAWFORD DINING ROOM - ANOTHER NIGHT

Joan is at the head of the table, presiding over a glowing candlelit dinner party of eight people, all dressed in black tie. A uniformed maid and butler serve like clockwork. Joan is radiant, enjoying herself and enjoying entertaining her guests. The SCENE OPENS with Joan's loud, delighted laughter at something the BEARDED MAN to her right has said. Joan touches his arm with her hand and bends towards him with a consiratorial smile and a lowered voice.

JOAN
That is divinely naughty!

Joan's eye is caught by Hal, at the other end of the table. He has leaned over and kissed an attractively-middle-aged LADY on the cheek.

ANGLE ON JOAN'S EYES

which close into slits of furious jealousy.

BACK TO SCENE

Hal has straightened up again from what was clearly just a friendly gesture. Joan's building rage is interrupted by a guest.

BLONDE LADY
Have you heard that the Simons are adopting a little boy?

BEARDED MAN
It's becoming an epidemic. That's the third couple I've heard about recently.

JOAN
Gloria Simon? Since when does she like kids?

FAT MAN
Since adoption became a great publicity stunt. That bitch can't stand children.

BLONDE LADY
They're giving a huge party, the invitations just went out.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BEARDED MAN
It also means no stretch-marks if they cast her in an over-the-hill bikini movie.

Joan has been listening closely to this information. It has made her thoughtful. She wants to get off the subject.

JOAN
Speaking of movies, tonight's screening is 'Today We Live,' which is how I met Franchot Tone.

Joan stands up, begins leading the guests out of the room. One of the WOMEN guests, whose hair is piled on her head in a mass of curls, walks beside Joan.

CURLY WOMAN
What fun -- I love knowing the behind-the-scenes story.

HAL
(hesitantly)
Joan, I wonder if you'd excuse me? I have an early meeting... also we've seen this one three times.

Joan turns on her heel and gives Hal a searing glance.

HAL
(continuing)
You know I hate to miss any of your movies, honey, but...

JOAN
(interrupting)
Then don't miss it.

She turns on her heel and continues leading the way out of the dining room. Hal stands there for a second. The other two couples busy themselves with getting up from the table, avoiding looking at Hal.

INT. SCREENING ROOM - LATER

The room is dark, the end titles are just coming up on the screen. The lights come on in the screening room, which is a cheerful room done predominately in red and white, with three rows of large armchairs facing the screen.

ANGLE ON JOAN

glancing over at Hal, who has fallen asleep in his chair. There is a malevolent smile on her lips.

ANGLE WIDENS as Joan motions to the other four to stay quiet. She pretends solicitousness.

JOAN
(whispering)
Let him sleep, poor darling. He's been working so hard. Shhh. Let's go outside and have a brandy.

They leave the room. Joan bringing up the rear. With a final stare of cold fury at the sleeping figure, she closes the door and turns a key in the lock on the outside.

INT. SCREENING ROOM - SOMETIME LATER THAT NIGHT

The room is dark but we can MAKE OUT Hal, still asleep in the chair. He changes his position, then he sits upright. He fumbles on the control panel between his chair and where Joan had sat earlier -- he finds the switch and turns on the lights, shielding his eyes from them. He looks at his watch, scrunches his eyes shut and open to force himself awake, then gets up. He goes towards the door. His expression is one of resignation and dread, imagining what he'll have to take from Crawford. He tries to open the door. He knocks on it when he realizes it's locked. He knocks louder. He pounds on it. He kicks it. He turns back into the room and looks at the walls, which are windowless.

HAL
Shit. Goddamn crazy bitch.

He goes into the adjoining bathroom and looks up at the small window. No way he can fit through that. He goes back into the screening room.

HAL
(continuing)
Shit, shit, shit.

He looks at the phone on the control panel. He reluctantly picks up the receiver, pushes down one of the buttons and dials. The light on the other button flashes. There is a muted RINGING that can be faintly HEARD from a phone in another part of the house. The light blinks on and off, but no one answers it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HAL
(continuing)
Goddamned bitch.

He slams the receiver down and sits there for a beat, brooding. Then he goes back into the bathroom. He rips the towel bar off the wall and breaks the window with it. He puts all his anger against her into breaking through the window. Then he uses the edge of the sink to hoist himself up so he can climb out.

EXT. SCREENING ROOM - NIGHT (MINUTES LATER)

Hal manages to crawl through the small window, but just barely. He lands on the ground with a bone-crunching thump.

HAL
Fucking bitch.

EXT. CRAWFORD DRIVEWAY - NIGHT (MINUTES LATER)

Hal comes trudging through the shrubbery, his elegant clothes totally dishevelled. He is brushing himself off. He opens the door to his Cadillac, sits down behind the wheel and feels for the car keys in the ignition. Nothing. He slams his fist against the steering wheel, shaking his head in enraged disbelief that she'd go this far.

ANGLE ON SECOND STORY BALCONY

Joan appears in a diaphonous negligee and tosses the keys down into Hal's car, which is a convertible with the top down. The keys hit him on the shoulder.

CLOSEUP ON JOAN'S MALICIOUS SMILE

As she turns to go back into the house, Hal yells up.

HAL
(calling out)
You bitch. You're a crazy fucking bitch.

INT. JOAN'S DRESSING ROOM - FOLLOWING AFTERNOON

Joan is finishing getting dressed. Hal is pacing with a drink.

CONTINUED:

HAL
I'm sorry for calling you that,
all right, Joan? But I think
that locking me in was a bit...

JOAN
Let's stay on the point: what
you said to me.

HAL
I've apologized. What the hell
else do you want from me?

JOAN
Are you really sorry?

HAL
(weary)
Yes, Joan. I'm really sorry.

JOAN
Then prove it to me. Get down
on your knees and apologize.

HAL
What?!

JOAN
(very calm)
I said if you really mean it, then
get down on your knees and apologize.

HAL
(rolling his eyes)
But, Joan, I think...

JOAN
(getting angry)
If you mean it, you will. Franchot
did.

HAL
He did??

JOAN
Certainly.

Joan stares at Hal, then lowers her eyes to the ground in front of her, then back up at him with a commanding expression. Hal heaves a deep sigh. The things a guy will do for a great lay. He gets down on his knees. He looks up at her.

HIS POV - JOAN'S FACE

puffed up with a victorious smile. He shakes his head but goes on with it.

BACK TO SCENE

HAL

I'm sorry, Joan.

JOAN

(gaily)

You're forgiven.

Joan holds her hand out to Hal to help him up. She treats it as though it's all been a game. A deadly serious game.

JOAN

(continuing)

Let's get to the Simons' party and see what sort of little brat they've gotten.

EXT. GARDEN PARTY - THAT AFTERNOON

A gala outdoors party is underway, with a yellow and white striped tent covering the back yard of a huge mansion in Hancock Park. Masses of yellow and white flowers abound everywhere, there is a combo playing MUSIC at the far end of the tent, and tables are set up along the walls of the tent serving opulent food. Glamorous women in flowery dresses and garden party hats sip champagne, many of them with children in tow.

ANGLE ON A MAN

in front of a huge roast beef, which a CHEF in a high white hat is carving into thin slices and putting onto people's plates on top of small sourdough rolls. The MAN holds his plate out like everyone else, but does not pull it back after the Chef places his miniature sandwhich on it. The Chef looks at the man, then carves another slice, puts it on another roll, and places it on the Man's plate. When the man still does not retract his plate, the Chef looks up at him with a critically disdainful expression.

MAN

What's it to you?

CONTINUED:

The Chef thinks about it for a moment, shrugs, realizes it doesn't matter to him. He shrugs and with a pleasant smile slices off several pieces of beef and piles them on the man's plate.

CHEF

Bon appetit.

The Man gives the Chef a "Thanks buddy" smile. A LITTLE GIRL in a frilly party dress tugs on her MOTHER's hand. The Little Girl points to a little boy, MAX, who is up in GLORIA SIMON's arms in the middle of the room.

LITTLE GIRL

Look, Mommy, is that the little
boy they just bought?

The Mother looks horrified and bends over to her daughter. She is mortified, glances around to see if anyone heard. She yanks the child roughly by the wrist away from the crowd.

MOTHER

(intense whisper)

Never say that again, Lucy.

The Little Girl looks worriedly at her Mother, who is red-cheeked with embarrassment that her daughter has repeated things she heard at home.

LITTLE GIRL

You won't sell me, will you, Mommy?

The Mother hugs the Little Girl to her, picks her up in her arms.

MOTHER

Of course not, darling. Come, let's
go meet Max.

The Mother carries the Little Girl towards the center of the crowded room. Many other guests are gathered around Gloria Simon. Her husband BILL is now holding the three-year-old boy, Max, who is wearing a French outfit: shorts with shoulder straps, a lace-trimmed shirt, knee socks and tie shoes. Photographers push and shove into the crowd, snapping dozens of pictures of the beaming parents and their celebrity guests as they come to pay their respects. A lot of AD LIBBED "Congratulations, Gloria," "Isn't he adorable?" "It's a wonderful thing you've done, giving this boy a home."

ANGLE ON THE STEPS

that lead from the house down into the tented melee. Joan, with Hal and Bob slightly behind her, stops at the entrance. She surveys the festive scene: people dancing on the small wooden floor set up in front of the band, children are weaving through the crowd, giggling together, but the main activity is in the middle of it all, the little boy and his new parents. A photographer sees Joan, turns away from the threesome he's been photographing and comes towards Joan, taking her picture. Joan brightens, puts on a big smile. Another photographer sees the flashbulbs of the first ond and dashes over, too. He takes a few more shots of Joan, who is getting ready for quite a few more. But the two photographers turn quickly and hurry back over to the center of the room, where applause has broken out over something Max has done. Joan is tight-lipped, angry at the rejection. Hal takes Joan's arm, escorts her down the steps.

BOB
That kid's headed for a three-picture deal.

JOAN
More than his 'mother' can say for herself.

Joan gives a dirty look to the mass of attention being lavished on the threesome. She and Hal are headed for the bar. A different PHOTOGRAPHER pushes past Joan to get a better angle on the family threesome.

PHOTOGRAPHER
Excuse me, Miss Crawford.

A beat, as Joan considers the implications of a photographer by-passing her for a kid. Joan's frown turns to a big smile as she gets an idea. She pushes her way through the guests hovering around the child and reaches the parents and child. Joan throws open her arms to Gloria -- who looks stunned, since Joan has never given her much more than a passing nod before.

JOAN
Gloria, congratulations!

As Joan hugs Gloria, several guests whisper "It's Joan Crawford." "Where?" and the photographers start popping pictures. Joan releases Gloria, turns her attention to the little boy, whom she plucks out of his new father's arms, kissing Bill on the check as she does.

CONTINUED:

JOAN
(continuing)
What a lucky boy to be adopted by you and Gloria. All the best, Bill.

Joan gives little Max a kiss. Max looks less than thrilled, looking mournfully over at his parents.

JOAN
(continuing;
cooing)
And aren't you a beautiful boy?

Joan kisses the child and the flashbulbs go off like crazy. With a big smile, Joan cheats her face towards the cameras and kisses Max again. More flashbulbs, and Max can stand it no longer. His face melts into misery and he begins to cry. Joan hands him back to Gloria.

JOAN
(continuing; cooing)
Ah, isn't that sweet? He already misses his new Mommy.
(to Gloria, but also
for the press people)
It's just wonderful of the Simons to take this dear child and give him a loving home.

Joan starts to clap, which triggers general applause. Joan beams with pleasure as she leaves the center of the circle, with people now making way for her, according her the reverence she's accustomed to.

ANGLE ON JOAN AND HAL

at the bar, an hour or two later. They have been drinking and having a good time. Joan puts her glass up on the bar for a refill. Her mind is churning; she looks across the room, day-dreaming. Hal watches her. Joan sees a Man at the dessert table, taking petits fours and cookies and putting them discreetly into his jacket pockets. It's the same Man who took so much roast beef. Joan looks back over at Hal with a contented smile.

JOAN
You know what's missing in my life?

Hal just watches her, unsure what's going to come next. Joan is unusually sweet and soft.

CONTINUED:

JOAN
(continuing)
A baby.

Hal's expression is one of amazement as he looks at Joan's dreamy smile.

EXT. DRIVING IN MALIBU

Hal is looking over at Joan with the same incredulity as in the previous shot, only now he's behind the wheel of his Cadillac convertible and he and Joan are taking a drive along the Pacific Coast Highway. Joan is totally relaxed. She has slid down on the seat so that she's stretched out, her head leaning against the back of the seat. She takes dainty sips from a monogrammed silver flask as she talks in a dreamy, self-absorbed voice. Hal is quietly alarmed.

JOAN
A little teeny baby.

HAL
Hadn't you better get a husband first?

JOAN
Who needs one? I'm going to adopt, find a little angel who needs me.

HAL
You can't do it alone, Joan. A child needs a father, too.

JOAN
I don't need anyone. I can make a wonderful home for a baby all by myself.

HAL
(firmly)
Joan, be reasonable. You're single. You're too old. And...

A beat, as Hal watches Joan take another healthy sip from her flask.

HAL
(continuing)
And you drink too much,

CONTINUED:

Joan carries on her fantasy as though she hasn't even heard Hal's rebuke. She is joyful.

JOAN
A beautiful little baby. I'm going to give it all the things I never had.

HAL
(annoyed)
Like a father? Joan, it worries me, you going on like this, as though you mean it.

JOAN
Of course I do! A little angel to love and to cuddle.

Joan hugs herself in imitation of the scene she sees in her mind. CLOSE ON her almost desperate smile, envisioning how she'll envelop this child.

JOAN
I'm going to make a perfect life for me and my little darling.

EXT. CRAWFORD GARDEN - DAY

Christina's fifth birthday party extravaganza is underway. There is a circus-animal merry-go-round rotating. Children yell delightedly, mingling with the SOUND of the MUSIC that plays as it goes around. There is a pony ride, the handler dressed in a hobo costume as he leads children around on two Shetland ponies. A clown is surrounded by half a dozen children as he juggles and balances things on his big red nose. THREE PHOTOGRAPHERS, several cameras around each of their necks, take pictures of this fairytale birthday party.

ANGLE ON JOAN

surveying the party from the patio, a drink in hand. She is wearing a gingham-checked dress with short puffy sleeves, that has a rick-rack trimmed pinafore over it. She smiles broadly for a BALD PHOTOGRAPHER, who takes her picture as she watches something carefully.

JOAN'S POV

of a beautiful blonde little girl, CHRISTINA, who is wearing a dress that is identical to Joan's. Christina and two other children stand in front of an organ grinder with a dressed monkey that is doing little tricks for the children as the organ grinder plays his music. The monkey shakes Christina's hand.

ANGLE ON JOAN

watching nervously, poised to rescue Christina should anything go wrong. She can't contain her anxiety.

JOAN
(calling out)
Christina!

Christina runs over to her mother. Joan bends down, hugging the child, relieved to have her out of harm's way.

JOAN
(continuing)
Having a good time, darling?

CHRISTINA
I love you, Mommie dearest.

Christina gives Joan a big hug. The Bald Photographer gets himself in position to take their picture. Joan instinctively repositions Christina in the hug so that their faces are cheated towards his camera.

CONTINUED:

Christina doesn't realize the photographer is there and looks quizzically at her mother.

JOAN
Smile, sweetheart.

Christina responds instantly, snuggling her face unnaturally close to Joan's and putting on a big smile. They freeze while the Bald Photographer takes the picture. A second Photographer comes towards them. Christina follows him with her eyes but holds the contrived mother/daughter pose, maintaining her artificially wide smile. They continue to freeze until he gets his shot.

BALD PHOTOGRAPHER
Could we get some of you and Christina in the rose garden, Miss Crawford?

Joan stands up, is about to say yes, but sees a small spot on Christina's dress. Joan looks annoyed.

JOAN
You've gotten a spot on your dress, Christina. Go upstairs and change.

Christina looks pleadingly at her mother, with a whiny voice, reluctant to leave the party.

CHRISTINA
Oh, Mommie.

BALD PHOTOGRAPHER
That won't even show up, Miss Crawford.

Joan looks severely at Christina and points towards the house. Christina hesitates for an instant, deciding whether to argue or not. Then she runs obediently into the house. Joan turns back to the Photographer. Her tone is gracious, yet chastising.

JOAN
She is Joan Crawford's daughter, Mr. Abrams.

Joan suddenly turns away from the Photographer, her attention is captured by a toddler who is running shakily across the lawn, headed right for the ponies. Joan looks stricken with anxiety. The child's mother, MARIE, is running after her. Joan runs toward the mother and child. The little girl falls flat on her face, tripped by a small dog that has been running alongside her.

CONTINUED:

Joan and Marie reach the child at the same time. She is crying. Marie picks her up, slightly out of breath, comforting the child. Joan is worried.

MARIE
(to Joan)
She's getting so quick, I can barely keep up.

JOAN
Marie, you nearly gave me a heart attack. Those ponies could have killed her!

MARIE
I don't know what to do. I turn away for one second and...

Joan holds up her hand to interrupt her.

JOAN
I have just the thing for you. I used it when Christina was little. I'll bring it out.

Joan heads back towards the house. She passes a long table covered with party tablecloth, hats, decorations, favors. Joan stops short as she notices something on the table. Ada is putting the finishing touches on the baskets of jelly beans at each child's seat.

JOAN
(continuing; intensely)
Ada! The crusts are on the sandwiches. Is there time for that lazy bitch to fix them?

Ada looks at the finger sandwiches on silver platters. She speaks carefully, aware that Joan is on the verge of blowing up.

ADA
Not really, Joan. But on the whole wheat, the crust sort of blends.

There is a beat as Joan scrutinizes the platter, deciding whether to let it go. Her mind is on what she is going into the house to get for Marie.

JOAN
All right. But fire the cook in the morning.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Joan continues towards the house, stops, turns back to Ada.

JOAN
(continuing)
After breakfast.

CUT TO:

EXT. CRAWFORD GARDEN - DAY

Joan kneeling beside Marie and her toddler. Joan is putting a child's harness on the child, buckling it in back. Marie is watching, afraid to contradict Joan. Marie's expression indicates that she is repulsed by the idea of harnessing a child.

JOAN
They're a nightmare at this age.
I could never have controlled mine
without this.

Joan straightens up, hands the leash end of the harness to Marie. Marie accepts it reluctantly, looking at it as if it is a dead fish. Joan is smiling brightly. Christina comes running over, wearing another copy of the dress that matches Joan's. Joan bends over to straighten the bow tie in back. Her comments are to Marie.

JOAN
(continuing)
Here's my little Tina, now. You
know, if they'd ever told us how
hard it was to be a mother,
there'd be a lot fewer of us!

CUT TO:

EXT. ROSE GARDEN

Joan and Christina frozen in position in the rose garden. Christina is holding a straw basket and looking up at Joan, who is reaching to cut a rose with clippers. They are wearing sunbonnets that match their dresses. The Bald Photographer snaps pictures, talking as he shoots.

BALD PHOTOGRAPHER
Good, that's great. If you could
reach for a high flower, Miss
Crawford. And look up at Mommy,
Christina.

CONTINUED:

The Photographer gets down in a crouching position and focusses on Christina, who turns towards him with a winning smile. He clicks off several shots.

BALD PHOTOGRAPHER
Terrific, that's great. She's fabulous, a real natural.

ANGLE ON JOAN

who is still reaching up for a flower and suddenly realizes she is no longer the center of attention. Joan breaks her pose and stares icily at the enthusiastic Photographer who is snapping pictures of Christina. She is hamming it up like a little pro. Joan's cold tone stops them both in their tracks.

JOAN
I was under the impression you were doing an article on Joan Crawford. If you're more interested in cute little girls, they're a dime a dozen.

She gestures towards the children who are playing in the b.g. Joan smiles at him graciously, yet maintains the sarcastic icy tone.

JOAN
(continuing)
You don't have to take my time for that.

INT. CRAWFORD LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Joan is pouring coffee into demitasse cups for her dinner guests. She is wearing a glamorous velvet hostess gown.

JOAN
Sugar, Margaret?

Joan looks up at MARGARET, who shakes her head. Behind Margaret, Joan sees Christina and CHRISTOPHER, who is three or four years younger than his sister. They both wear fancy pajamas and bathrobes, monogrammed, and matching bedroom slippers. A NANNY stands behind them.

JOAN
(continuing)
Well, look who's come to say goodnight. Come in, children.

CONTINUED:

Christina walks to Margaret, with Christopher behind her, mimicking Christina's well-rehearsed performance. After each guest Christina curtsies and Christopher bows his head.

CHRISTINA
Good night, Aunt Margaret. Good night, Uncle Sam.

CHRISTOPHER
G-night Aunt Margut, g-night Unca Sam.

Christina and Christopher walk to the next guests. Joan watches them attentively, proudly, as a trainer would watch a performing dog go through its paces.

CHRISTINA
Good night, Aunt Ethel. Good night, Uncle Milton.

CHRISTOPHER
G-night Aunt Effel, g-night Unca Mitton.

Ethel and Milton exchange an appreciative smile, as if to say, "Aren't they adorable?" Christina and Christopher reach Joan. They both get down on their knees in front of her, with their hands held together in front of them, as though they are saying bedtime prayers. They recite by rote, in unison, with Christopher's voice lagging slightly behind Christina's.

CHRISTINA/CHRISTOPHER
You are the most beautiful wonderful Mommie in the world. I love you, Mommie dearest.

Both children stand up afterwards and kiss their mother on the cheek. We can SEE Margaret and Sam exchange a furtive glance, indicating that they find this performance peculiar. The children do not seem adversely affected by it: they're used to it. They smile and walks towards the Nanny who is waiting for them. As they go out of the living room, Christina's hand darts to the plate of cookies on the table beside the couch. She conceals the stolen cookie, but Joan has seen it. Her voice cracks like a whip and Christina freezes in her tracks.

JOAN
Christina Crawford! What have you got in your hand?

CONTINUED:

Christina looks around at all the grown-up faces watching her. She is panicked. She stands where she stopped, with her back to Joan.

CHRISTINA
Nothing.

JOAN
(chilling)
Turn around when you speak to me, young lady.

Christina turns around, keeping her guilty hand behind her. She tries to meet her mother's gaze but it is too frightening.

JOAN
(continuing)
Come right back over here.

Christina shuffles over to Joan. Her mother grabs her hand roughly, turning it palm up and gripping the child so tightly that she is forced to open her fingers. The cookie falls to the floor.

JOAN
(continuing)
You call that 'nothing'?

Joan pulls Christina towards her, the child resists out of fear. Christina's resistance only angers her further. Joan yanks down Christina's pajama bottoms, hikes up the bathrobe covering her and pulls the child across her lap. She proceeds to spank her, bare-bottomed, with her open palm. The room is totally quiet except for the SHARP SLAPPING sound of the spanking. After the first few hits Christina begins to cry, as much from humiliation as from the pain. Christopher, standing by the door holding the Nanny's hand, begins to cry out of sibling sympathy. There is nothing for a few moments but the SLAPPING NOISE and the sobbing of the two children. The guests look either embarrassed, shocked or try to pretend it isn't happening by looking away. Joan stops hitting Christina, pulls up the sobbing child's pajamas and holds her with a hand on each of Christina's upper arms. Joan is less angry but still firm, speaking for the sake of the onlookers as well as Christina.

JOAN
(continuing)
How many times have I told you never to lie? Lying can only get you in trouble. Do you understand, Christina?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The girl nods through her sobs. Her reply is muffled.

CHRISTINA
Yes.

JOAN
(sharply)
'Yes' what?

CHRISTINA
Yes, Mommie dearest.

JOAN
You may go to bed now.

Christina hurries out of the room, her head bowed in shame. Joan stands.

JOAN
(continuing)
Children are so difficult.
Excuse me while I go tuck them in.

INT. CHILDREN'S BEDROOM

Christina is lying in bed, holding a stuffed animal. She is upset from the incident downstairs and is on the verge of crying again. Joan comes into the bedroom and walks right past Christina as if she isn't there. She goes directly to Christopher's bed and buckles the straps of a harness which holds him into the bed. The little boy watches his mother as she straps him in. She smiles down at him, gives him a kiss.

JOAN
Sweet dreams, Christopher.

CHRISTINA
Sweet dreams, Mommie.

Joan turns and walks out of the bedroom, right past Christina without even a glance in her direction. Christina watches Joan as she strides out of the room. Christina's humiliation from before is now compounded by this total rejection. As soon as Joan has left the room, Christina starts to sob, hugging the stuffed animal.

EXT. PALM SPRINGS RESORT - LONG SHOT - DAY

of the swimming pool of a posh Palm Springs hotel, with short green grass surrounding it.

CONTINUED:

Tanned bodies lie oily under the noonday sun, stretched out on pool chairs. All heads turn to see a procession moving across the lush lawn towards the pool. Leading the group is Joan, her fabulous legs exposed between the short white terry cloth robe and her ankle-strap sandals. A SUITOR walks behind her, carrying a poodle that wears a monogrammed white terry coat that matches his mistress'. Behind the Suitor are Christina and Christopher, also in matching robes, and a white-uniformed NANNY, different than the one we saw earlier. As the briskly moving processional reaches the poolside area, the CAMERA MOVES IN. Joan is lecturing the children.

JOAN

I want you to get it right. I
want to see two little champs,
today. Don't let your legs flop
over in back, Christina.

Christina, now about eight, and Christopher, five-ish, go to the edge of the pool. Christina sits down on the edge, puts her foot gingerly in the water to test the temperature. Joan strides over and stands above the children.

CHRISTINA'S POV - JOAN'S LONG, SHAPELY LEGS

that tower over Christina and block out the sun.

JOAN

No sissy-stuff. Dive right in!

ANOTHER ANGLE - THE POOL

The children are perched on the edge, their arms out behind them, bent over in preparation to dive. They look tired and water-logged. They are waiting for their mother's orders. Joan watches them from a pool chair where she is stretched out.

JOAN

(calling out)

That's better, but don't arch your
back, Christina. Okay: one, two,
three, drive!

The children splash into the pool. The CAMERA STAYS ON the water. Their faces re-emerge with expressions of exhaustion and silent complaint as they paddle to the edge. They hoist themselves out of the water and collapse on the warm cement. They look over at Joan. She smiles at them. They smile back, relieved. Christina starts to lie down on the cement. Joan's voice interrupts her.

CONTINUED:

JOAN
(continuing)
Now let's do it again, just like that.

The children's smiles fade. Christina makes a pained expression. Joan speaks sharply in response to it.

JOAN
(continuing)
If you can't appreciate being in this lovely place, then you can stay in the room, young lady.

Christina and Christopher get up quickly and take their diving position at the edge.

JOAN
(continuing)
One, two, three, dive!

ANGLE ON THE NANNY

who has been watching with concern. She speaks hesitantly to Joan.

NANNY
Don't you think they should have a rest?

JOAN
(angry)
Discipline keeps them from becoming spoiled brats. Being made to do things properly builds character.

The Nanny looks over at the children, who are standing at the edge of the pool, shivering slightly. The Nanny is afraid to contradict Joan, but is worried about the children.

NANNY
(softly)
They're only kids.

Joan gives an angry, derisive snort of sarcastic laughter.

JOAN
Only?! I was a kid once, and I didn't have a goddamn thing.

EXT. LUNCH AREA - SEVERAL HOURS LATER

The remains of lunch are on the table, where Joan and her Suitor are drinking coffee. The children play on the lawn.

JOAN
(calling out)
Who wants to go swimming with Mommie?

Both children jump up enthusiastically and run towards her.

CHRISTINA
I'll race you, Mommie!

EXT. POOL AREA - IMMEDIATELY AFTER

Joan and Christina are side by side in the water, holding onto the pool's edge with one hand and staring fixedly across at the other side of the pool. Christina is totally concentrated. Joan's Suitor stands across the pool from them.

SUITOR
On your marks, get set, go!

Christina pushes off first. Joan is smiling. We assume she is letting her daughter get a head start so she can win. But when Joan pushes off her expression is as determined as the child's was. Joan is a strong swimmer and, in several strokes, reaches Christina and plows right on past her, traversing the pool's width in only five or six powerful strokes. Christina reaches the edge, pulls her head out of the water and looks crestfallen when she sees that her mother is already there, with a triumphant smile. Christina looks hurt and slightly puzzled. Joan smiles at her, apparently oblivious to the child's pain.

JOAN
Again?

Christina nods and her expression brightens. She assumes that she will win this time, that her mother was just teasing.

SUITOR
On your marks, get set, go!

Joan and Christina push off together. Joan pulls ahead immediately and swims full speed towards the other side. Christina is buffetted by the wake of waves that her mother leaves behind.

INT. JOAN'S BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT

Christina, rubbing her eyes and shuffling sleepily in her nightgown, comes into Joan's bedroom. She advances cautiously towards the bed. Her mother is asleep, the black satin eyeshade contrasting with the mounds of lacy white pillows around her head and shoulders. There is a bottle of vodka and a half-empty glass on the bedside table.

CHRISTINA
Mommie? Mommie?

Joan rouses from sleep, pulls her eyeshade up over one eye. Christina is on ther verge of tears.

CHRISTINA
(continuing)
I had a bad dream.

Joan pulls aside the covers, inviting Christina into bed with her. Christina climbs in. Joan strokes her head. There is a beat while they cuddle.

CHRISTINA
(continuing)
That wasn't fair, when you beat me, Mommie.

JOAN
Whoever said life was fair, darling?

CHRISTINA
But it's not fair, to win twice.

JOAN
I'm bigger and faster, Christina. I can always win.

Christina sniffles. Joan raises her chin with a finger. She is firm, but gentle.

JOAN
(continuing)
You have to be a good sport. If life spits you in the eye, you have to spit right back.

Joan kisses Christina on the forehead and hugs her tightly.

INT. MGM EXECUTIVE BUILDING HALLWAY - DAY

Joan, dressed to the nines, strides regally down the wide hallway of the studio.

CONTINUED:

She turns her head slightly towards the wall and slows down just a little as she passes blown-up photographs on the walls that are from her movies. A MAN in a business suit comes up behind Joan and walks with her a few paces.

MAN
Joan, you look terrific.

JOAN
Thank you, how nice of you to say.

The Man turns into a doorway. Joan continues walking. Two Secretaries stick their heads out of the doorway the Man just entered and stare at Joan's retreating figure, awestruck that they've seen The Star Herself. Joan goes through double glass doors at the far end of the hall.

INT. L.B. MAYER'S OUTER OFFICE

There are two SECRETARIES at adjoining desks outside the closed door to Mayer's inner office. One Secretary is on the phone as Joan walks in. The Other stands up deferentially. Joan is very friendly.

CONNIE
Hello, Miss Crawford.

JOAN
Hello, Connie, that's a lovely blouse.

CONNIE
Oh thank you, Miss Crawford.

Connie, flattered and flustered to get a compliment from Joan Crawford, comes around her desk and opens the door to Mayer's office, knocking first. Joan walks through the door, Connie shuts it behind her.

INT. L.B. MAYER'S OFFICE

MAYER
Come in, Joan, have a seat.

Mayer barely looks up from papers he has on his desk. There are two other MEN in the room, one of them standing by Mayer, the other going through a file. Joan looks at one and then the other; she doesn't know them and she doesn't know why they are here. They bob their heads in greeting.

CONTINUED:

Joan is confused by this unceremonious greeting from Mayer. She sits down slowly. Without looking up from his desk, Mayer directs a question at the man with the file.

MAYER
(continuing)
What were the numbers on Joan's last movie?

MAN #1
We lost four million, L.B.

L.B. nods to himself. Joan stiffens in her chair. Mayer signs some of the letters and papers in front of him. He looks up at the Man standing beside his desk, then looks back down.

L.B.
What's the reaction in New York on her new one, Tom?

MAN #2
Pretty weak, L.B. Popcorn sales are up: but the buying is during the picture.

Joan looks defensively from one Man to the next. She's like a cornered animal, but she fights to maintain her cool. Mayer finally looks up from his papers and gives Joan a big, fake smile.

MAYER
Joanie, your pictures are doing terribly.

JOAN
They're terrible movies, L.B. I keep begging you for a script with some balls. Write it for Gable and I'll play it.

L.B. nods slowly, gives her a patronizing smile.

MAYER
It's too late for that here, Joan. I think you'd be better off with a fresh start at another studio.

JOAN
But this is my home, I've been here since I was a girl. Where am I going to go?

CONTINUED:

MAYER
We made you Joan Crawford. Any
of the studios would want Joan
Crawford. It just isn't working
for us.

Joan stares at him, in shock. L B. looks back down at his desk, then up at Joan again. He wears the same plastic smile.

JOAN
So I stay through my contract,
or...?

MAYER
We have Mary packing your things
now.

EXT. MGM LOT - SHORTLY LATER

Joan stands by the door of her convertible, outside her dressing room door. The car is filled with boxes, paintings, the paraphernalia of years. MARY, Joan's wardrobe lady, slams the trunk shut. Her eyes are red-rimmed from crying. She walks hesitantly towards Joan, fighting back more tears. They give each other a big hug. Tears trickle down both their faces. They stand back and muster a brave smile. No words are necessary. Joan gets in behind the wheel, starts the car, and begins to drive slowly down the street. A MAN in the door of the PROP department waves at Joan with a big smile.

PROP MAN
Good luck, Joan!

Joan waves at him, keeps driving slowly. She passes a MAN ON A BICYCLE.

MAN ON A BICYCLE
See ya', Joan. Take care.

JOAN
Thank you, George.

Joan smiles. She turns the corner and stops the car. She closes her eyes and takes a deep breath. She bows her head down on the steering wheel. She's being sent away from the one home she's ever known; her life is crumbling. She loses her composure and starts to sob, her shoulders heaving several times. Suddenly she stops and sits up very straight, taking another deep breath.

CONTINUED:

She throws her shoulders back like a and sits up tall and square. She twists the rearview mirror around to see herself and wipes under the eyes. She sets her jaw and gives herself a big smile in the mirror. She puts the mirror back in its original position and starts driving again. She turns a corner and begins to head down the long road towards the studio gate. She drives slowly down the avenue, which has people on either side of it, waving to her, coming to see Joan Crawford leaving the studio. They wave, blow kisses and call out AD LIBBED comments like: "We love ya', Joan;" "Good luck!" "Goodbye, Joanie!" Joan smiles and waves to them regally as she makes the long, slow drive off the lot, like a queen going into exile. She finally approaches the gate itself. She sits up even straighter and holds her chin high.

GUARD
Good luck, Miss Crawford.

JOAN
Thank you, Tommy.

Joan drives through the gate, her teeth clenched in a tight smile. She turns the corner and pulls the car over to the curb. She takes a deep breath and exhales it in exhaustion. She lets her head rest on the steering wheel, worn out by the performance she just gave.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CRAWFORD GARDEN - DAY

Joan and Christina are at the tool shed near the rose garden. Joan puts tools into a wheelbarrow: flower clippers, hedge, trimmers, an axe, a rake, a shovel. She hands a bamboo rake to Christina, which is twice her height and indicates for her to follow. Joan wheels the barrow toward the rose garden. Christina follows, dragging the rake behind her. Joan is seething with anger, which she keeps under control.

JOAN
Goddamned gardener. Now that I can only afford him once a week he doesn't give a damn. Start raking under there!

Joan points under a tree. Christina starts wielding the rake, struggling to scrape leaves with it. She watches her mother warily, recognizing how manic she is. Joan takes long-handled clippers out of the barrow and begins cutting branches of flowers off a rose tree.

CONTINUED:

JOAN
(continuing)
We'll show him! I pay him every day for years, then when times get tough -- he disappears.

Joan throws the clippers back into the wheelbarrow and seizes a long-handled scythe. Joan grabs it tightly and slashes awkwardly at a rose bush. Petals and leaves fly off it. She practices another slash at the rose bush and manages to fell most of the bush. She takes aim and slices at the remaining stalks. Christina stops raking and watches her mother with wide, fearful eyes. Joan looks up at Christina with a big smile. She heads for another rose bush, the long gleaming sword of the scythe in front of her, a warrior going to battle.

JOAN
(continuing)
There's no loyalty anymore, they're all Judas'. That lazy, unfaithful bastard!

Joan savagely attacks another rose bush, flattening it with one powerful swoop of the blade. She smiles and advances on the next one. Christina stares at her mother, paralyzed by the frightening sight of Joan advancing on the beautiful trees and bushes in front of her, leaving the garden levelled to the ground behind her. Joan glistens with perspiration, bits of leaf in her hair as she advances on the next rose bush, ready to demolish it.

INT. CRAWFORD KITCHEN - LUNCH TIME

Joan is dressed in a very nice dress, with a fancy hostess apron over it. Ada is helping her put a roast beef on a carving board and vegetables in covered dishes.

ADA
The roast looks gorgeous, Joan, what a treat.

JOAN
I don't know how much longer I can afford Sunday lunches at these prices. And I'm not going to do lousy parts just to keep meat on the table.

INT. CRAWFORD DINING ROOM

There are four guests around the table, along with Christina and Christopher. Joan carves the roast, Christina stares at it with a horrified expression, watching the blood run onto the plate with the very rare meat.

CHRISTINA
I can't eat it rare, Mommie.

JOAN
Meat loses its vitamins if it's overcooked. We're lucky to have a roast.

Joan passes a plate to Christina that is running with blood. Christina is white with nausea and accepts the plate with a disgusted expression.

CHRISTINA
But I had my vitamins this morning.

Joan slams her hand down on the table.

JOAN
Dammit! You negotiate everything, like a goddamn Hollywood agent.

Christina stares down at her plate with a miserable expression, which only increases Joan's anger.

JOAN
(continuing)
You aren't getting up from this table until you've eaten that meat, Christina Crawford.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CRAWFORD DINING ROOM - SEVERAL HOURS LATER

Christina is sitting alone at the table. Her untouched plate of meat is in front of her. Her elbows are on the table and her chin rests on her hands, which are clasped together. This is a stubborn little girl. Joan comes into the dining room and stands next to Christina. She shakes her head at Christina, who sits back and looks up at her mother. Joan studies her for a moment.

JOAN
You may get up from the table now.

Christina breaks into a big smile and jumps up from the table.

CONTINUED:

JOAN
(continuing)
Take your plate into the kitchen.
At dinner we'll see just how
stubborn you are, Miss Christina.

Christina flashes an angry, defiant look at her mother.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CRAWFORD DINING ROOM - DINNER TIME

Joan, Christopher and Bob are eating spaghetti and meatballs. Christina has the same plate of meat, still untouched, in front of her.

JOAN
Stop this nonsense and eat,
Christina. We cannot afford to
waste food.

CHRISTINA
I hate rare meat. I can't eat it.

JOAN
We don't want your sour
expression spoiling our dinner.

Christina's disgusted pouty expression remains unchanged.

JOAN
(continuing)
You may be excused from the table.

Christina stands up, her lips pursed angrily and starts to leave.

JOAN
(continuing)
Please put your plate back in the
refrigerator.

Christina takes her plate and goes through the swinging doors into the kitchen. Joan stands staring at the swinging doors. This child is a handful. Joan lets out a sigh of frustration and exhaustion.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CRAWFORD BREAKFAST ROOM - MORNING

The morning sun streams into the cheerful room with flowered wallpaper and flower-patterned dishes. Christina watches Christopher pour cream on his frosted flakes. She is very hungry by now and watches greedily as he spoons the cereal into his mouth. Christopher stops when he realizes she's staring at him. He fills up a spoon and holds it towards Christina. She shakes her head, a proud martyr. Joan walks into the breakfast room. Her face is covered with a mud pack and her hair is held away from her face with a band that makes it stick up on her head so that she looks bizarre and sinister. She is carrying Christina's plate of meat and sets it in front of her. Christina stares straight ahead. Joan looks at her. She is fed up, but tries to be reasonable.

JOAN
You cannot always have your way,
Christina. Now stop being so
foolish. You've got to eat.

CHRISTINA
I can't eat rare meat.

A beat as Joan returns Christina's steady, determined stare. Joan shakes her head, amazed by the girl's toughness.

JOAN
Why must everything be a contest?

Christina looks out the window, then back at her mother. They lock eyes. Christopher stops eating his cereal and looks apprehensively between them.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CRAWFORD PATIO - LUNCHTIME

Joan is sitting on a chaise studying a script, a drink by her side. Christopher, wearing his school uniform, comes out to greet his mother. He has a fingerpainting with him. He comes over and stands patiently beside Joan, waiting for her to acknowledge him. There is a beat as she continues studying, then she looks up with a forced smile, her attention still on the script. She holds out her cheek for Christopher to kiss, which he does. He holds out the fingerpainting.

CHRISTOPHER
Look, Mommie.

CONTINUED:

JOAN
(distracted)
Very nice, dear. Now go in the kitchen, Ada's got your lunch.

Joan's attention returns to her script. Christopher obediently heads back inside. Joan suddenly looks up.

JOAN
(continuing)
Where's your sister?

Christopher shrugs. Joan is annoyed with him, even though he's only a little boy. Her tone gets snippy.

JOAN
(continuing)
Was she on the bus with you, Christopher?

Christopher is frightened by her tone. He shakes his head, looking nervous. Joan looks puzzled. She calls out towards the kitchen.

JOAN
(continuing)
Ada!

Ada comes hurrying out, drying her hands on a dishtowel.

JOAN
(continuing)
Christina wasn't on the bus. Call the school and find out what's going on.

Ada starts back into the house, but stops when Joan shouts.

JOAN
(continuing)
Wait!
(beat)
Handle it discreetly. The last thing I need is a scandal, some story about a runaway child.

EXT. BRENTWOOD STREET - SHORTLY LATER

Joan is driving slowly down a residential street. She peers carefully up and down the street, looking nervously for Christina.

CONTINUED:

Joan turns a corner, driving slowly. She sees two ten-year-old girls from behind, one of them blonde. She speeds up, but slams her fist on the steering wheel as she gets closer and realizes it isn't Christina. She drives to the end of the street, turns again, having circled the block. She turns down another street. She pulls alongside a MAN walking a dog.

JOAN
Have you seen a blonde girl, about
ten?

MAN
No. But say, aren't you... ?

Joan accelerates before he can even finish recognizing her. She turns another corner and hits the brakes. Christina is up ahead, trudging on the side of the road. Joan lurches forward, hitting the gas. She throws the car into park and jumps out. She runs towards Christina, who turns when she hears footsteps running behind her. The child cringes reflexively, unsure whether to run or freeze. Joan's eager relieved tone of voice reassures her. Joan hugs her tightly.

JOAN
We were so worried, are you all
right? Never do that again,
Christina, you frightened Mommie
so much.

Joan holds Christina away from her, to inspect her, to reassure herself that she's got her back. Joan smiles; Christina doesn't return the smile. She doesn't trust Joan, doesn't know what to expect. Joan smiles again, pleadingly. Christina gives a tentative smile and Joan gathers her back into her arms in an almost suffocating embrace.

CLOSEUP ON JOAN

who speaks to Christina as the child is squeezed against her, looking out over Joan's shoulder.

JOAN
I do things for your own good,
honey. I want to prepare you for
life. It's no bowl of cherries.

CLOSEUP ON CHRISTINA

smothered in her mother's arms. Her face is blank. She doesn't understand. Joan loosens her grip and holds Christina away from her again. Christina looks down at the ground and Joan gently raises her chin so their eyes meet. Joan smiles at Christina with seductive mischievousness. Christina smiles back. Joan senses something is still wrong.

JOAN
(continuing)
What's wrong, Tina?

Christina smiles self-consciously, shrugs, then speaks cautiously.

CHRISTINA
I'm hungry.

Joan bursts out laughing, gives her a kiss.

JOAN
I'll bet you are! Shall we sneak
over to the Apple Pan for a hamburger?

Christina nods enthusiastically. Joan gets serious.

JOAN
(continuing)
I love you more than anything,
Christina. I love you very much.

A beat as Christina looks at her mother and knows just what she's supposed to reply.

CHRISTINA
I love you too, Mommie dearest.

Joan grabs her back into a crushing hug. It is ambiguous, whether Christina was being sincere, or whether she's just learning how to survive.

INT. JOAN'S DRESSING ROOM AT HOME - NIGHT

Joan is wearing a long black nightgown and preparing for bed. She takes a sip from her highball glass and tissues off the layer of cold cream on her face. She applies lotion with a cotton ball, then takes a painted paper Japanese fan and fans her face to dry the lotion. She then hooks on her chin strap, which looks like a medieval torture instrument. She scrutinizes her face, pulling closer to the mirror. She pulls the skin back on her cheeks and eyes, smoothing out the lines. Then she puts on a cream that leaves her face gostly white.

CONTINUED:

Next she puts her black satin eyeshade over her head, leaving the eye patches at her hairline, like a pair of sunglasses propped on her head. She takes another swig of vodka, sucks in her stomach and stands tall, examining herself in the mirror. With a sigh, she walks out.

INT. CHILDREN'S BEDROOM

Joan stands at the door to their bedroom, light streaming in behind her. She sees that they are both sleeping. She bends down to pick up a sweater on the floor. She turns on a light in the closet and begins to hang up the sweater when she freezes. She stares at a dress that is hanging, then yanks it off the rack. Her eyes widen with anger as she pulls the dress off the hanger.

JOAN
(shouting)
A wire hanger!

Christina sits up in bed, startled awake.

CHRISTINA'S POV - JOAN

Her POV of Joan is of a monstrous figure in a flowing black nightgown, stark white face, and black eye mask up on her forehead, chin strap below. Joan's eyes are glittering in an alcoholic rage.

JOAN
How many times do I have to tell you, no wire hangers!!

Joan turns back to the closet and in a frenzied rage pulls all the clothes off the bar they're hanging on and flings them into the room. She grabs at the sweater boxes up on the shelf and hurls their contents into the room. Christina holds her pillow against her. Christopher, trapped in his harness, lies still as a possum, only his fear-widened eyes following his mother's movements. When Joan has emptied the closet she strides to Christina, who cringes as her mother's hand reaches out for her. Joan grabs Christina by the hair and pulls her out of the bed. The child yells in pain and fear as Joan drags her towards the closet. Joan then lets go of her and starts attacking her bed, ripping off the sheets and blanket and tossing them into the middle of the room where some of them fall on top of Christina, burying her. Christina pokes her head out from under, scared to look, but scared not to.

ANGLE ON JOAN

who suddenly spies another wire hanger on the floor. She snatches it up and starts beating Christina through the covering of bedclothes.

JOAN
(yelling)
No wire hangers!

CHRISTINA
Stop, Mommie! Please stop!

JOAN
When will you learn, no wire
hangers!

Joan stops pounding on Christina. She grabs the child by the wrist and drags her out from under the blankets.

JOAN
(continuing)
Now clean up your mess, you good-
for-nothing bastard!

Joan turns towards the open bathroom door and her expression becomes even more crazed. She pulls Christina towards the bathroom, the child dragging behind her along the carpet.

JOAN
(continuing)
Did you scrub the bathroom today?

Christina, too frightened and shocked to let herself cry, staggers to her feet as they reach the bathroom door and Joan turns on the light.

CHRISTINA
Yes, Mommie.

Joan whirls on her, raising her hand as if to slap her. Christina shies.

JOAN
'Yes, Mommie' what?

CHRISTINA
Yes, Mommie dearest.

Joan lets go of Christina and kneels down beside the sink, running her finger across the floor, which is totally clean.

JOAN
You call this 'clean'?

CONTINUED:

CHRISTINA
(quivering)
Miss Jenkins said it was clean.

Joan yanks open the cabinet under the sink, pulls out a can of cleanser and stands up, grabbing Christina again.

JOAN
Is that all you can do?
contradict your mother?

Joan smashes the cleaner can down on Christina's head and hits her several times with it until the cardboard can bursts open and the white powder goes flying everywhere, mostly onto Christina.

CHRISTINA
Help! Stop! No. Please. Stop!

Joan flings the broken can against the wall and shoves Christina further into the bathroom.

JOAN
You'll get no help. You'll clean
up your mess by yourself. And
I'll inspect in the morning, you
lazy little bitch.

Joan flounces out of the room, slamming the bedroom door behind her. There is a beat. Nobody moves. Christopher slithers out of his restraint. He gets up and goes to the bathroom, from whence come muffled sobbing noises. Christina appears at the door, wiping her face with a washcloth, the white gritty powder all over her.

CHRISTOPHER
I'll help you, Tina.

Panicked, Christina stops crying.

CHRISTINA
Stay where you are, Christopher.
She'd kill me if she found out.

Christina takes a deep breath, looks around at the tornadoed room. She shakes her head in amazement, Her next words are ones she's rarely used, grown-up, forbidden ones.

CHRISTINA
(continuing)
Jeezis Christ.

INT. JOAN'S DRESSING ROOM ON THE SET - DAY

Joan is in a glamorous dress. Her face is being made up by her makeup man, who has finished one half of her face. One side has a false eyelash, heavy eyeliner and shadow, shading on the cheekbones. The other side is still naked and shows Joan's age. Her hairdresser is finishing her hairdo; Mary irons a scarf in the b.g. The DIRECTOR of the film stands next to Joan, full of enthusiasm.

DIRECTOR
This is going to be a really big hit, Joan. The studio is thrilled, especially after how cooperative you were on those last two pictures. This one is going to put you right on top, L.B. Mayer's going to eat his heart out!

JOAN
I'm loving every minute of working with you. And I'm really looking forward to those flashbacks, when I'm ten years younger.

DIRECTOR
I've wanted to talk to you about that, Joan. We're running a little over budget so we're going to have to cut those scenes.

Joan's smile and charm vanish. She stares at him fiercely.

JOAN
What are you talking about! Those are my best moments.

DIRECTOR
I'm sorry, but they've got to go. We can't afford it.

Joan motions for the makeup man and hairdresser to back off. She rips the towel from around her neck and throws it on the ground.

JOAN
Those scenes are essential to my role. I refuse to go on with the film if you cut them.

A beat as he returns her cold stare, watching to see if she's bluffing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOAN
(continuing)
I've come far enough in my career that I don't have to take this kind of shit, being cut off at the knees.

DIRECTOR
If you insist, you leave us no choice.
(beat)
But let's hope we're right about how successful this movie's going to be.

JOAN
It's ridiculous to even consider sacrificing important scenes because of money.

DIRECTOR
People often take a position about the wrong issue at the wrong time.

Joan looks at him suspiciously, hearing a veiled threat.

JOAN
What's that supposed to mean?

DIRECTOR
I'll do the scenes because I need you! You've got me by the short and curlies. I don't like being blackmailed by a star I need in order to finish a picture.

JOAN
An actress is just a piece of meat, even when she's a star. The only difference is in the price of the cut.

DIRECTOR
(smiling with a sneer)
And it's a buyer's market.

Joan stands up tall, refusing to be bullied, even though she is shaken.

JOAN
I won't be bullied down on what I believe in, I'd rather starve.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Director gives her a sinister smile.

DIRECTOR
I hope it doesn't come to that.

He turns to leave, his lackey following.

CLOSEUP ON JOAN'S PROUD BUT FRIGHTENED EXPRESSION.

She has gotten her way, but at a steep price.

INT. JOAN'S DRESSING ROOM - EVENING

Joan is getting ready to go out for the evening and Christina is keeping her company. Joan is putting on her eye makeup at the vanity table and Christina is standing beside her, preening in front of the full-length mirror as she has seen her mother do. Christina is brushing her hair, which falls in silken curls past her shoulders. Joan is in a foul mood -- her face isn't getting any younger and makeup doesn't conceal as much as it once did. She has no patience for Christina's chatter and replies in an annoyed, snappish tone.

CHRISTINA
Was Shirley Temple's hair naturally curly, Mommie?

JOAN
I don't know, Christina.

CHRISTINA
My hair is naturally curly, isn't it?

JOAN
Yes, Christina.

CHRISTINA
My hair is very beautiful...

Joan turns sharply and watches as Christina brushes her hair gently, admiring herself with a smile. Joan's eyes flash with envy and anger -- at Christina's youth, prettiness, self-admiration. Christina continues to look in the mirror, unaware of her mother's mood.

CHRISTINA
(continuing)
My hair is more beautiful than Shirley Temple's, isn't it, Mommie?

CONTINUED:

Joan jerks open the drawer of the vanity and pulls out a pair of hair scissors. In the same motion she grabs a handful of Christina's hair and cuts it off, practically at the roots. Before Christina can move, Joan grabs another handful of hair and snips it off, too. She is standing up now and her eyes are blazing. The child is paralyzed with astonishment and fear. Joan continues cutting as she rants.

JOAN
I won't have such disgusting vanity.
How beautiful do you think you are
now?

Joan grasps Christina's face in her hand, squeezing her at the chin so that her cheeks squash together around her mouth, distorting it. Joan twists the child's face back towards the mirror, forcing her to look at herself.

JOAN
(continuing)
Vanity makes me sick to my stomach.
How dare you be so vain?

Joan grabs the remaining hair and lops it off, leaving Christina with uneven patches of butchered hair, her scalp visible. The child starts to cry, horrified by the sight.

INT. SCHOOL OFFICE - FOLLOWING DAY

Christina and Joan sit on a couch across from the PRINCIPAL, who is ill at ease being in the presence of Joan Crawford. He is fidgety. Christina, her hair hideously shorn, sits very still and stares at the floor.

PRINCIPAL
I felt we should have a conference
since the other students have been
teasing Christina. She said that
you cut off her hair because...

JOAN
(interrupting with a
laugh)
That I cut it off?! How absurd.
Christina did this to herself.

Christina looks up, shocked.

PRINCIPAL
I'm terribly sorry, Miss Crawford,
if I offended you. But I had no
idea that...

CONTINUED:

JOAN
(interrupting)
Not at all, you had no way of knowing Christina's deceptions can be so convincing.

The Principal and Joan look sternly at Christina. She has been caught totally off guard by Joan's accusation and doesn't know what to say.

PRINCIPAL
Christina, I'm very disappointed in you. You've put me in a terribly awkward situation, calling your mother in like this.

JOAN
Please, Mr. Samuels, it's no trouble at all. I'm glad to be here to straighten this out. You can imagine how shocked I was to find Christina in my dressing room, with her hair all over the floor.

Christina has looked to one and then the other with a frantic, trapped expression. She is being gaslighted and it is working; she isn't sure herself what happened.

CHRISTINA
But, Mommie, you said I was vain and you grabbed my hair and...

JOAN
(interrupting sharply)
I've warned you about lying, Christina, and now you're carrying it too far.

Christina just stares at her mother in disbelieving shock. She's so confused by the assertions that she doesn't know what the truth is.

JOAN
(continuing)
Now I want you to apologize to Mr. Samuels.

Christina looks over at the Principal, then down at the ground, then back at her mother. For a moment she considers defending herself. With a puzzled expression, her brow furrowed, she starts to cry.

CHRISTINA
(through her tears)
I'm sorry, Mr. Samuels.

JOAN
And... ?

Christina looks up at Joan's severe, reprimanding expression. She swallows her sobs and catches her breath long enough to speak again.

CONTINUED:

CHRISTINA
I'm sorry, Mommie dearest.

Christina now breaks down crying. Joan pats her back sympathetically. The Principal looks worried, solicitous. He speaks in a confidential tone to Joan.

PRINCIPAL
Perhaps we can look into why she
did this?

Joan nods with an expression of concerned compassion. She also speaks in a low, whispering voice.

JOAN
Perhaps we should let her wear a
scarf for awhile until it grows out?

CLOSEUP ON JOAN

looking lovingly, all-forgivingly, at Christina, who has her face in her hands and is crying pathetically.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Christina, now about twelve or thirteen, sits at her desk doing homework. The DOORBELL RINGS. Her mother calls out to her from the hall.

JOAN (O.S.)
Christina? Please bring Uncle Al
upstairs.

Christina makes a face. She looks disgruntled.

JOAN (O.S.)
(continuing; sharp and
loud)
Christina! Did you hear me?

Christina gets up slowly from her desk, rolling her eyes to the ceiling. The DOORBELL RINGS again. She answers as she goes to the hall and downstairs. She articulates each word separately, controlling her annoyance with her mother, who is out of sight in her dressing room.

CHRISTINA
(calling out)
Yes. Mommie. Dearest.

Christina reaches the front door and opens it. A beefy, smiling MAN with a grey crew cut, aggressively good-natured, comes in.

AL
Hello, Christina.

CHRISTINA
Hi. Mom said to come upstairs.

Christina leads the way up the stairs. She resents being the go-between and her self-conscious impatience shows on her face.

INT. JOAN'S DRESSING ROOM

Christina leads Al to the door between the bedroom and dressing room. On the mantle over the bedroom fireplace is Joan's Oscar statuette. Joan stands from her vanity table to greet Al. She is wearing only a lacy half-slip and matching bra. Christina blushes and looks down at the ground. Joan is completely at ease. She doesn't make eye contact with Christina, even when addressing her. When a man is present, he gets Joan's full attention. And she really pours it on for Al.

JOAN
Hello, you handsome devil.

Joan puts her arms around his neck, gives him a big wet kiss. Christina is embarrassed, tries not to look, and turns to leave.

CHRISTINA
I'll bring Uncle Al a scotch.

Joan keeps her arms around Al's neck and moves in for another kiss. Christina hurries out.

INT. BAR AREA DOWNSTAIRS

Christina pours scotch over ice in a glass, with a disgusted expression. She adds a squirt from a seltzer bottle. Then a little mischievous smile comes over her. She fills the glass up with scotch and stirs it with her finger.

INT. JOAN'S DRESSING ROOM - SAME TIME

Al is sitting on the chair in front of the vanity table. Joan has her leg up on the edge of the table, provocatively right in front of Al's face, as she pulls on a stocking. She pulls back the lace edge of her slip to get the black garter strap. She caresses her leg as she smoothes the stocking. Al is eyeing her and getting aroused, which is her intention. Al reaches out his hand to touch her leg and Joan playfully taps it away, teasing him further. She then rolls up her other stocking and inserts her foot, pulling it slowly, sexily, onto her leg. Al can stand it no longer, and pulls her onto his lap and begins kissing her passionately.

Christina arrives at the door with scotch in hand. She comes to a sudden stop, both fascinated and revolted by their embrace. Joan's back is to the door, so she doesn't see Christina arrive.

CONTINUED:

AL
We've got company.

Joan pulls away from the kiss and gets up off Al's lap. Joan smoothes her slip, fixes a stray strand of hair. Joan looks uncomfortable. Christina is intrigued by what she's seen, and looks between her mother and Al.

JOAN
It looks like my little girl is growing up.

AL
Into a great-looking little lady.

Al eyes Christina appreciatively. Joan watches him, jealousy flashing in her eyes. She goes back to Al and puts her arms around his neck.

JOAN
Then maybe it's time for her to go away to school... for my protection!

Joan kisses Al on the lips. Christina watches, fascinated.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIMOUSINE - DAY

Joan and Christina are in the back seat. The car drives through a wooded section of Brentwood and pulls through stone gates with a sign, "CHADWICK SCHOOL." Christina is on the verge of tears, grabbing onto the arm of her mother's fur coat.

CHRISTINA
I don't want to go. Please let me stay at home.

JOAN
Complaining, as usual. No gratitude for all the things I provide you with, including a fancy boarding school.

Christina looks pained, stares out the window glumly.

HER POV

of an imposing mansion set on landscaped acres.

ANOTHER ANGLE

The car pulls up in the circular drive and MRS. CHADWICK, the headmistress, comes out to greet them. She is fifty-ish, with a kind face and very good posture. The driver jumps out of the car and opens the back door. Christina holds her mother's arm again and looks at her pleadingly, tears in her eyes. Joan gives her a reprimanding stare and gets out of the car.

EXT. CHADWICK ENTRANCE

Joan shakes Mrs. Chadwick's hand and pours on the gracious charm.

JOAN
How kind of you to greet us, Mrs.
Chadwick.

Christina shakes Mrs. Chadwick's hand and looks at her with a nervous, pained expression. Mrs. Chadwick is warm and gentle.

MRS. CHADWICK
I know you'll be very happy here,
Christina.

CHRISTINA
(earnestly)
I won't. Please don't make me
stay. I don't want to leave
home.

Mrs. Chadwick looks surprised and concerned. She puts her hand comfortingly on Christina's shoulder, then looks over questioningly at Joan. Joan shrugs it off with firm charm, overriding Christina's desperation.

JOAN
It's just last-minute jitters.
You'll see how lucky you are to
be at this lovely school.

Joan kisses Christina on the forehead and shakes Mrs. Chadwick's hand. Joan's attitude to Christina's unhappiness is flippant; Mrs. Chadwick is compassionate.

CHRISTINA
Please, Mommie, don't leave me
here. I'll be good, let me stay
at home.

CONTINUED:

JOAN

That's enough nonsense, young lady. What will Mrs. Chadwick think? You may call me collect, but no more of this whining. And, Mrs. Chadwick, please let me know if she gives you any trouble.

MRS. CHADWICK

I'm sure everything will be fine once Christina settles in, Miss Crawford.

Joan gets into the car and waves gaily. Christina stares mournfully at the car as it goes down the long drive. Mrs. Chadwick puts her arm around Christina and walks her towards the main door.

MRS. CHADWICK

(continuing)

I know just how you feel.

Christina looks up at Mrs. Chadwick in amazement, unprepared for empathy.

MRS. CHADWICK

(continuing)

The first time I went to sleep-away camp, I cried myself to sleep and wet my bed for days. Leaving home is scary, isn't it?

Christina looks up at Mrs. Chadwick with big, tear-filled eyes. She nods. Mrs. Chadwick takes out a lace hankie and dries Christina's eyes.

MRS. CHADWICK

(continuing)

I promise you it gets better, and you can't imagine what made you cry. But will you promise me one thing, Christina?

Christina looks up at Mrs. Chadwick's loving face and nods tentatively. Mrs. Chadwick gives her a big smile.

MRS. CHADWICK

(continuing)

That at least you won't wet your bed?!

Christina and Mrs. Chadwick burst out laughing together.

INT. SCHOOL DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Christina is sitting at a round table with seven other students, BOYS and GIRLS in the fourteen to sixteen age range. She is shy and self-conscious, amazed by the cynical, sharp-tongued attitudes of her fellow boarding students.

BOY #1
This soup tastes like dirty dishwater. They must hire cooks who get fired from the army.

GIRL #1
No, they're probably the ones my mother fired. Luckily, we didn't have to eat their crap for long because they'd always quit when she got drunk and yelled at them.

GIRL #2
You were lucky she picked on the cook instead of her husbands. My mother's lost three because of her temper. At least you can always call up and hire another cook.

BOY #2
They should start an agency in Beverly Hills where you hire husbands and wives. There'd be fewer divorces.

ANGLE ON CHRISTINA

who is listening to all of this in amazement. She begins to loosen up, listening and realizing that other kids' lives are as messy as hers. She looks across the table at a dark-haired boy. He returns her look and gives her a smile.

GIRL #3
Then they wouldn't have to send all of us away when their lives fall apart.

GIRL #1
Christina, how many times has your mother been divorced?

Christina is afraid to answer. She looks over at the dark-haired boy and he gives her an encouraging little smile.

CONTINUED:

CHRISTINA
Three, I think.

GIRL #2
You think? Well, which one was
your dad?

A beat. Christina debates whether to tell the truth. She musters courage.

CHRISTINA
None.
(beat)
I was adopted.

Christina expects to be teased. She looks over at the dark-haired boy, who gives her a reassuring look in return. The other kids are not mean, however. They're too cynical to be shocked by anything.

BOY #2
At least you don't have to put
up with a father on visiting day
who looks at his watch every two
minutes, wishing he was on the
golf course instead!

All the kids laugh. Christina looks around the table at her new companions. Her eyes stop when they meet those of the dark-haired boy. He is laughing. Christina begins to laugh, too.

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - DAY

Christina is up on stage alone. She is reciting a monologue for her acting clsss. She has the dialogue on a piece of paper, which she refers to a couple of times. The other kids are sprawled in the seats in the auditorium. As she recites, the CAMERA PANS their faces. They are all riveted on Christina. She is remarkably good.

CHRISTINA
(in character)
'Understand! The first word I
ever heard out of any of you was
that word "understand." Why
didn't I "understand" that I must
not play with water -- cold,
black, beautiful flowing water --
because I'd spill it on the palace
tiles.'
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)
'Or with earth, because earth dirties a little girl's frock. Why didn't I "understand" that nice children don't eat out of every dish at once; or give everything in their pockets to beggars; or run in the wind so fast that they fall down; or ask for a drink when they're perspiring; or want to go swimming when it's either too early or too late, merely because they happen to feel like swimming. Understand! I don't want to understand. There'll be time enough to understand when I'm old... If I ever am old. But not now.'

Christina pauses when she finishes. The auditorium has been totally quiet. The other students now break into spontaneous applause. Christina comes down off the stage, pleased but slightly embarrassed by their enthusiasm.

GIRL #1
That was great, Christina.

CHRISTINA
Thanks, Mary.

GIRL #2
What play is that?

CHRISTINA
'Antigone.' It's a Greek myth, but written by a French playwright.

There is APPLAUSE from one pair of hands from the back of the auditorium. All the students turn to see who is clapping. Mrs. Chadwick walks down the aisle towards them, still applauding. All the kids sit up straight for the headmistress.

MRS. CHADWICK
Forgive me for eavesdropping on your class, but I've been hearing how good you are and I wanted to see for myself.

DARK-HAIRED BOY
Can we have your autograph when you're a famous movie star?

He is teasing, and Christina gives him a playful, flirtatious punch on the arm.

INT. CHASEN'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Joan and Christina are in Joan's usual booth. Joan's eyes constantly rove the restaurant, even when she's speaking to Christina. Christina is uptight, afraid to do or say anything that will encourage her mother's criticism of her. Joan finishes one vodka after another during the scene.

JOAN
Isn't this fun, us having a date
when you come home for the weekend?
Do sit up properly, Christina.

Christina straightens her shoulders and sits up taller. She breaks off a piece of bread, butters it carefully and puts it daintily into her mouth. She watches her mother out of the corner of her eye, expecting criticism. Joan's attention is on some people who have just come into the restaurant.

JOAN
(continuing)
Look who's here: after all those
face lifts I didn't know she
could move her mouth enough to
chew. And that bastard, Harry
Mason.

Joan motions for the waiter, who brings over menus. Joan takes hers and continues looking at the doorway. The waiter smiles at Christina as he hands her the menu. She timidly returns his smile. Joan looks over and sees this.

JOAN
(continuing)
Don't flirt, Christina.

Christina blushes bright red and looks down at her menu, mortified. Joan hands her menu back to the waiter with a gracious smile.

JOAN
(continuing)
We'll have a steak for two; rare.

Christina looks up at the mention of rare meat. She looks at the waiter writing down the order. She considers whether to say anything, but stays silent.

JOAN
(continuing)
And two salads.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The waiter leaves.

JOAN
(continuing)
Flirting can be taken the wrong way. Besides, we do not socialize with those who serve us.

Christina takes a report card out of her purse.

CHRISTINA
Look, Mommie, I got all A's and one B.

Joan glances at the card, puts it down.

JOAN
(interrupting)
What about your Christmas card list? For three weeks I've asked you to prepare it.

CHRISTINA
I've had exams, Mommie. Besides, I'm not a baby anymore, I can do things myself.

JOAN
Sometimes I wish you still were a baby: not a moment's trouble, so obedient. Being away at school has made you rebellious. Perhaps you'd be better off at home?

Christina looks panicked at the idea of being taken out of school.

CHRISTINA
I'm sorry. I've had a lot of schoolwork. Isn't that more important than a list of Christmas cards?

Christina's tone has been conciliatory, but Joan gets angry anyway.

JOAN
I work like an ox to send you to a good school, I treat you to a lovely evening like this, and I get smart-aleck backtalk.

Christina swallows her inclination to defend herself further.

CONTINUED:

She looks worriedly over at her mother. She is intimidated. Christina musters a smile.

CHRISTINA
I'm sorry, Mommy dearest. I'll
try to be better.

JOAN
We'll see, dear. Now let's enjoy
dinner.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Christina is propped up in bed, reading. There is a soft KNOCK at the door, Christina looks up anxiously. Joan enters the room. Christina searches her face, expecting a tirade of some kind. But Joan is soft and sweet. She sits down on Christina's bed. She is wearing a long cotton nightgown and matching bathrobe.

JOAN
Wasn't that fun tonight, just us
girls, now that Christopher's
away at military academy?

Joan smiles at Christina, then frowns slightly as she looks at Christina's hands. Joan's tone is schoolmarmish.

JOAN
(continuing)
I do wish you'd take better care
of your nails, though, it's so
important.

Christina self-consciously puts her hands under the covers. Joan's smile returns. She uses a soft, pleading tone with Christina.

JOAN
(continuing)
I'm feeling a little lonely.
Would you like to spend the night
in my room, Tina?

Christina tries to conceal her lack of enthusiasm. She smiles weakly.

JOAN
(continuing)
It used to be so much fun, remember?

CONTINUED:

Joan takes Christina's hand out from under the covers and gives it a playful little tug. Christina searches for a diplomatic way to say "no."

JOAN
(continuing)
Come on, for your Mommie dearest.

Christina smiles and starts to get out of bed. Joan has won her over.

INT. JOAN'S BEDROOM - SHORTLY LATER

Joan meticulously lines up a row of pillows down the center of the bed, making a wall to separate her from Christina. Christina looks at the pillow construction quizzically. Joan gets into her side of the bed, taking a sip from her bedside vodka. She pats the pillow on Christina's side as though encouraging a dog.

JOAN
Come on, in you get. But none of your wriggling around, or I won't be able to sleep. I have a big interview tomorrow, and I must have my beauty rest. Lie still.

Joan has on her chin support, her hair pulled back in an unflattering band, her face covered with grease. She slips on a black satin eyeshade as she settles under the covers and turns off her bedside light.

JOAN
(continuing)
Good night, Christina.

CHRISTINA
Good night, Mommie dearest.

Christina lies down gingerly on her half of the bed, afraid to jostle her mother. She glances sideways at the godlike woman in her menacing eyeshade. Christina's expression indicates that Joan is still an all-powerful, godlike figure to her. Christina lies on her back, tense from the effort of staying still. She stares up at the ceiling, frozen still, a prisoner in her mother's bed.

INT. CHRISTINA'S ROOM AT SCHOOL - MORNING

Christina enters the room.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She has just returned from the weekend at home. Her roommate, SUSAN, is half-dressed, with rollers in her hair and books and papers spread out on her desk and bed. She is continuing to dress, studying the pages as Christina comes in.

CHRISTINA
Oh, no, I forgot about the biology test!

Christina peels off her coat and makes a beeline for Susan's notes. The minute Susan sees Christina, she forgets all about studying and starts talking a mile a minute.

SUSAN
Christina, this guy barged in yesterday and took all your stuff. I tried to stop him but he said it was your mother's orders to take away all your clothes and...

CHRISTINA
(interrupting)
What do you mean? I was with my mother yesterday.

Susan pulls Christina over to her closet. It is completely empty, nothing but a few hangers, some tissue paper and empty shoe boxes on the floor. There is one plain cotton dress hanging. Christina looks shocked and turns to Susan, who looks apologetic and distraught.

SUSAN
He said he had orders. That you'd know why you were being punished.

Christina shakes her head in disgust. She bows her head, squeezing her eyes shut, putting her hand over her face, then straightening up. Susan looks worried, touches Christina's arm sympathetically.

SUSAN
(continuing)
What'd you do?

CHRISTINA
You know I don't have to do something.

Susan nods, looks at Christina with concern. Christina laughs sardonically.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHRISTINA
(continuing)
I didn't do my Christmas card list. Jeezis. So now I have no clothes.

SUSAN
How can you stand it? Keep going back there?

A beat. Christina looks out the window, thoughtful. Her tone is one of resignation.

CHRISTINA
Because she's my mother.

Christina takes a deep breath, turns back to Susan with a sad smile.

CHRISTINA
(continuing)
Come one, we'd better cram for the test.

EXT. CHADWICK SCHOOL GROUNDS - EVENING

Mrs. Chadwick is taking an after-dinner stroll around the school grounds with her two Corgiis. The dogs sniff and run ahead of her. Suddenly the dogs perk up and start whining and barking outside a gazebo which is surrounded by bushes. Mrs. Chadwick walks past the dogs. When they don't follow, she gives a little whistle. They continue barking at the gazebo. She goes back to see what has excited them. They are on the steps of the octagonal building. She walks up.

HER POV

of a boy and girl on the floor of the gazebo. Their shirts are unbuttoned, otherwise they are dressed, but the boy is on top of the girl. There is enough light to see that Christina is the girl, and the Dark-Haired Boy is on top of her.

MRS. CHADWICK (O.S.)
Mr. Adams! Miss Crawford!

INT. MRS. CHADWICK'S OFFICE - DAY

Joan is pacing and smoking, in a rage. Mrs. Chadwick is behind her desk and Christina is on the couch, silent and still.

CONTINUED:

JOAN
(to Christina)
How would you humiliate me like this? I'm ashamed to be the mother of... I can't even think of the word!
(to Mrs. Chadwick)
How could you let this happen?

MRS. CHADWICK
I understand your concern, Miss Crawford. Both students have been put on probation and have no privileges for a month.

JOAN
Probation! You don't understand how appalling this is. I've devoted myself to making Christina a proper young lady.

MRS. CHADWICK
I don't believe it is that serious. When this sort of thing has happened before we have found...

JOAN
(interrupting, shouting)
Before?! Is this an institution of learning or a teenage brothel you're running? I'm paying a fortune so my daughter can get a diploma for screwing?

MRS. CHADWICK
Please, Miss Crawford. Chadwick has had an impeccable reputation for fifty years. And when students break the rules we curtail their freedom.

JOAN
(to Christina)
You're leaving here right now. Obviously you can't be controlled in this environment.

Christina breaks down and cries. Mrs. Chadwick continues to keep control of her temper and to try and reason with Joan.

CONTINUED:

MRS. CHADWICK
Nothing really happened between your daughter and the young man, it was innocent. I think you're over-reacting, Miss Crawford.

JOAN
And I think you're under-reacting, madam, to the filthy behavior of sluts.

Joan grabs Christina by the hand, jerks her to her feet, and propels her towards the door. Christina looks pleadingly at Mrs. Chadwick.

JOAN
(continuing)
My compliments to your school on its 'impeccable reputation.'

INT. JOAN'S CAR - IMMEDIATELY AFTER

Joan grips the wheel as she drives out of the school gates. She fumbles in her purse for her monogrammed silver flask. She shakes it and throws it on the floor when she finds it empty. Christina sits like a statue on the front seat next to her.

JOAN
Where the hell can I get some vodka around this dump?

CHRISTINA
There's a liquor store to the right.

Joan slaps her across the face. Christina flinches, but continues staring straight ahead like a zombie.

JOAN
I should have known you'd know where to find the boys and the booze.

Joan hits the accelerator pedal, and the car lurches forward with a SQUEAL of TIRES.

EXT. CRAWFORD PATIO - DAY

Joan and Bob are on the patio, having drinks. Joan has had several. Christina comes out.

CONTINUED:

Bob smiles when he sees her, unaware of what has happened.

BOB
Hello, Christina. I was sorry to hear you were expelled.

CHRISTINA
I was not expelled.

JOAN
Of course you were.

CHRISTINA
I was not expelled, that's a lie.

Joan reaches over and slaps Christina hard with her palm. Christina stares at Joan, a cold, hard stare. Joan slaps her on the other cheek with the back of her hand, a powerful swat. Christina's head jerks and her eyes water from the pain, but she keeps her jaw set. She will not cry or break down. Her strength infuriates Joan.

JOAN
You love it, don't you?

Christina stares, unflinching, at her mother, whose face is contorted in frustration and hatred. Joan slaps Christina again, desperate for a reaction, for the girl to crumble.

JOAN
(continuing)
You love to make me hit you, don't you?

CHRISTINA
You said I was expelled and that's a lie.

Joan springs out of her chair in a fury, boxing Christina's ears with all her strength, then grabbing her roughly by a handful of hair.

JOAN
How dare you call me a liar, you dirty little tramp.

Joan pulls Christina out of her chair by the hair and starts dragging her inside the house. She delivers the next line in absurdly polite way.

JOAN
(continuing)
Please excuse us, Bob.

INT. BAR AREA

Joan slams Christina up against the bar, so hard that Christina slumps down against one of the bar stools. Joan fixes Christina with her most potently terrifying glare but Christina just looks back at her, defiant in her silence and her refusal to break down under the physical attack. Joan's frustration at not being able to break Christina's backbone is inciting her to a murderous fury.

JOAN

Life has been just too cushy for you, off at that whorehouse where you could do and say what you wanted. You seem to have forgotten that I am the mother and you are the child and what I say goes. I command around here. Who the hell do you think you are, contradicting me?

CHRISTINA

I'm a person, I'm not one of your toadying fans.

Joan lunges at Christina, who puts her arms up to ward off Joan's blows to her head. Joan pummels Christina until she is out of breath.

JOAN

Get down on your knees and apologize, you little bitch.

CHRISTINA

I'm not the one who has anything to apologize for.

Joan goes for Christina's throat, throttling her. The force of her attack throws them both to the ground. Joan straddles Christina, strangling her with both hands and banging Christina's head on the floor. Christina fights back -- fighting for her life -- kicking, punching and making strangled screaming sounds. Her face is turning bright red and her eyes are bulging. Bob runs into the room and pulls Joan off of Christina, which takes all his strength. Joan is panting hard. She throws Bob's hands off her and stands up. Bob bends over Christina, who is dazed, lying in semi-shock. He helps her sit up, looking at her with great concern. Christina indicates that she's all right. Bob looks up at Joan, his expression demanding an explanation. But Joan just glares fixedly at Christina with hatred. She turns and leaves the room.

INT. CRAWFORD LIVING ROOM - THAT EVENING

Joan sits on the couch next to MR. MURPHY, a juvenile division officer wearing slacks and sportcoat. He looks uncomfortable in this expensive, elegant setting. Joan is being as charming as she would be with a reporter.

JOAN
My daughter will be right down. I think the best thing might be to put her away for a while.

Christina appears at the living room door. Her clothes are disheveled and her hair is in disarray. There is dried blood on her upper lip from her nose and the corner of her mouth. Mr. Murphy looks at her and turns to Joan.

MR. MURPHY
It is policy for me to interview the minor alone, Miss Crawford.

JOAN
Certainly.

Joan gets up with a gracious smile and brushes past Christina in the doorway as though she wasn't there. Christina remains standing in the doorway, staring dully at Mr. Murphy. He stands up, indicates a chair.

MR. MURPHY
I'm Mr. Murphy, from the juvenile division. Your mother says she can't control you and she wants you put in juvenile hall, but I'd like to hear your side of it.

Christina comes into the room, fire in her eyes now.

CHRISTINA
Lock _me_ up? She tries to kill me and _I'm_ going to jail?

MR. MURPHY
Take it easy, just tell me what happened. I'm here to straighten things out, not to put you in jail.

CHRISTINA
She said I was expelled from school and I said it was a lie -- which it was -- she attacked me. She strangled me and bashed my head on the floor and she would've killed me if...

CONTINUED:

Christina breaks down in sobs, of fear and self-pity.

MR. MURPHY
Calm down. I can see you've been beat up pretty bad but I'm sure your mother didn't want to kill you. Parents have a lot of pressures and problems that kids can't always understand.

CHRISTINA
I hate her! I don't care where you take me, as long as it's away from here.

MR. MURPHY
Slow down. I'm not going to put you in juvenile hall, Christina, but you're going to have to cool things out here. It's a very rough place: if your mother calls again they may take you in.

CHRISTINA
But she tried to kill me! Why don't they do something to her, something to protect me?!

MR. MURPHY
Until you're eighteen, there's not much anyone can do for you. Take my advice and find a way to smooth things out here, be grown-up about it.

CHRISTINA
She's supposedly the grown-up, she's got all the power, but I'm supposed to be the good guy?

Christina starts crying again.

CHRISTINA
(continuing)
It's not fair, it's just no fair.

MURPHY
Sometimes that's the way life is, Christina.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MOTHER SUPERIOR'S OFFICE - MORNING

Christina sits on a stiff-backed chair in front of a stiff-backed nun, the MOTHER SUPERIOR, a formidable woman. Christina's school uniform is a bit like a novitiate nun's costume. She is in a trance-like state, staring dully at the pious woman as she pontificates.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
Dear Christina, God has brought you to our convent school so that you can see the error of your ways. I know you have sinned in the past, transgressed against the Holy Commandments, but you shall find forgiveness here, my child. God, in his infinite wisdom and compassion, will give you the strength to beg forgiveness and be cleansed. Those who seek shall receive. Shall we pray together for your repentance, that the good Lord will grace you with His comfort and guidance?

The Mother Superior gets up from behind her desk and kneels on the single pew underneath her window. Christina gets up, robot-like, and kneels beside her. The light streams in on them. The Mother Superior bows her head and concentrates on her prayer. Christina stares blankly out the window, all life gone from her eyes, like a prisoner staring out at the free world, a million miles away.

INT. CHRISTINA'S DORM ROOM - AFTERNOON

A long, austere, prison-like room with utterly plain cots, each one with a blanket folded at the foot. A large crucifix dominates the room and is the sole decoration. The late afternoon light is soft and casts interesting shadows on the beds and floor. The CAMERA PANS the room, which appears to be empty except that we can HEAR the VOICES of CHRISTINA and ANOTHER GIRL, their mouths full of food as they talk.

CHRISTINA (O.S.)
Your mom sure bakes great cookies.

GIRL (O.S.)
You never get packages from home, do you? That would make me feel crummy.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

GIRL (O.S.)(CONT'D)
Plus having to stay in this joint on weekends and holidays.

CHRISTINA (O.S.)
It's kind of nice and peaceful when no one else is here.

GIRL (O.S.)
How come you send letters and stuff from arts crafts to your mom when you never get anything back?

The CAMERA FINDS the two girls sitting cross-legged on the floor between two beds. A tin of cookies between them that they are devouring. Christina shrugs matter-of-factly, without any self-pity.

CHRISTINA
She's my mother.

INT. CONVENT SCHOOL CHAPEL - DAY (FOUR YEARS LATER)

The afternoon sun is streaming through a stained glass window and casts a soft glow on Christina, who is on her knees praying. She has turned into a willowy young woman by now. Her head is bowed behind clasped hands. She raises her head and looks longingly at the statue of the Madonna and Child. The moment is reminiscent of Joan Crawford's prayer at the beginning of her career in Hollywood. Christina gazes earnestly at the statue, as if seeking a reply. She smiles faintly at the Madonna, as though she has gotten what she came for. Christina stands, crosses herself, and walks out of the pew. She is startled by the MOTHER SUPERIOR, who has been watching her, waiting for her to finish. There is an aloof warmth between them. Christina smiles at her. The Mother Superior puts her arm around Christina's shoulder and begins walking her out of the chapel.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
You looked so peaceful, just then, Christina. It pleased me, thinking what a long way you've come since you've been here.

Christina smiles at her as they reach the door. They go out into the sunlight, with the gardens laid out in front of them.

EXT. CHAPEL GARDENS

A peaceful moment as they walk down the gravel path side by side. Birds chirp, the sun is sinking.

CONTINUED:

MOTHER SUPERIOR
We're all so proud of you, Tina. You've been a model student and made such personal progress.

CHRISTINA
I owe so much to you, Mother. I was so unhappy when I was first sent here: I felt abandoned.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
You are welcome to stay on with us at the convent and carry out God's work. Have you thought about plans for the future?

CHRISTINA
I want to be an actress. I'm going to be really good: study hard and be successful.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
Acting is such a hard row to hoe. I'd be happier seeing you here. But I think you have the strength for it.

CHRISTINA
I know I can do it, I know I can! I want it so much.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
You have talent, Tina. And more importantly, I think you have the determination. I wish you all the best -- we will miss you here.

Christina is on the verge of tears, moved by her warmth and caring.

CHRISTINA
Thank you, Mother, you're so... I can't begin to thank you for...

Christina chokes up, the Mother Superior smiles at her. She pats Christina on the shoulder, as if to say "words aren't necessary -- I understand."

INT. CHRISTINA'S DORM ROOM - MORNING

Christina and two other GIRLS are cleaning up the long row of beds.

CONTINUED:

One of them sweeps, another dusts, another wipes the tops of the bedside tables. MUSIC from a portable RADIO plays softly and they hum to themselves, picking up the rythmn of the music as they work. BUMPING and BANGING NOISES in the hallway outside the dorm room cause them all to stop their work. Christina dives for the radio, shutting it off and shoving it under her mattress. They all go back to their tasks with pious expressions, eyes darting to the door to see which of the nuns is arriving. The door flies open and a DELIVERY MAN staggers in, his arms piled high with wrapped boxes. Behind him, a second DELIVERY MAN, with arms full of boxes, too.

DELIVERY MAN
Christina Crawford?

CHRISTINA
That's me.

The two men carry their loads over to Christina's bed and put them down. Christina looks surprised. The Delivery Man hands her a delivery notice and a pencil. She looks at them as though she doesn't know what to do.

DELIVERY MAN
You gotta sign for it, Sweetheart.
Else they'll say we disappeared with
five thousand bucks worth of clothes.

Christina's eyebrows go up in amazement. She signs the slip and hands it back, staring incredulously at the boxes rather than at the Delivery Man. He and his partner leave. The other Girls rush over to Christina, who stands staring at the mounds of boxes, looking at the address labels to see that they're really for her. The other Girls are excited.

GIRL
Aren't you going to open them?!

Christina slowly pulls open one of the boxes. Wrapped in yards of tissue paper she finds a beautiful dress. She holds it up against her and her expression of bafflement melts into a smile. The Girls' enthusiasm gets to her. She pushes boxes towards them.

CHRISTINA
Here, give me a hand you guys.

The other two each seize a box and rip it apart.

CONTINUED:

They gasp and "ooh" and "ahhh", AD LIBBED, as they take out shoes, cashmere sweaters, fancy underwear. Christina unpacks a fur coat. They all stop what they're doing to admire the soft luxurious fur. The two Girls look up at Christina with expressions of "what's this all about?" Christina looks at them with the same wonderment and shrugs. At that moment, a NUN comes into the room. The three girls stand up straight and look a bit guilty. Christina has put on a pair of kid gloves and she hides her hands behind her back, with a sense that she's done something wrong.

NUN
Your mother has sent a car, Christina. It is downstairs waiting.

Christina looks worried, fearing another outburst of her mother's.

CHRISTINA
But she can't take me away now! It's almost fime for final exams.

NUN
Don't worry, we've arranged it so you can take your schoolwork with you. Although two weeks on an ocean liner with your family may not leave a lot of time for studying, you lucky girl.

Christina's worry turns to delight, although she can't quite believe it.

CHRISTINA
Really? Are you sure?

NUN
Absolutely: Your mother called and arranged it all as a secret surprise. We're thrilled for you, Tina.

Christina turns to her friends and all three of their mouths fall open in delighted amazement. They give little shrieks of excitement and embrace Christina in a group hug, their arms forming a circle around her in her new fur coat.

INT. CRAWFORD HOUSE - EVENING

Joan and Al are in the living room.

CONTINUED:

Joan is drinking, but she is relaxed, content. Al sits on the arm of the sofa next to her and Joan looks up at him with adoration.

JOAN
I could not have appreciated you fully when I was younger. But now we've got to live every day right up to the top, to make up for lost time. I vowed I'd never get married again, and you've made me into the happiest liar in the world, Alfred Steele. It makes me greedy, wish we'd found each other years ago.

He kisses her, smiles at her lovingly.

AL
We'll have to live to be a hundred, that's all there is to it.

They kiss again. Joan breaks off the kiss and looks towards the doorway. She sees Christina, who has just arrived with a self-conscious smile. Joan smiles at her warmly.

JOAN
Never mind the newly-wed lovebirds, sweetheart. Come right in and give me a kiss.

Christina comes in, kisses her mother. Smiles awkwardly at Al.

CHRISTINA
Hello, uh...

JOAN
(interrupting gently)
Daddy. You can call him Daddy, Tina.

CHRISTINA
(hesitantly)
Hello, Daddy.

She gives him a little kiss on the cheek, looks at her mother apologetically, with a smile. She sits down next to her.

CHRISTINA
(continuing)
Congratulations on your wedding.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)
I tried to call but I couldn't get through. And to thank you for all the beautiful clothes.

AL
For a beautiful young lady. Your mother and I were so proud of your last report card, Christina. But I'll tell you, in my day, the smart girls were never the prettiest.

JOAN
Now, Al, don't go puffing up her head, it'll never fit in her cap and gown. Graduation is soon, isn't it, darling?

CHRISTINA
Next month. You're going to be there, aren't you?

JOAN
We wouldn't miss it for the world. I'm going to get something special to wear.

AL
First things first: I want to know where my new daughter is going to go to college.

CHRISTINA
I was accepted a few places, but I want to be an actress instead.

AL
(to Joan)
Wait a minute: She's a very bright girl. There's no reason why she can't study to be an actress and also get a good education. Northwestern is an excellent school. And they're famous for their drama department.

Christina turns to her mother with a shrug.

CHRISTINA
It's too late now, isn't it?

CONTINUED:

JOAN
Honey, remember something: It's never too late. With your grades you'll be in this fast.

Joan snaps her fingers. Joan and Christina smile at each other.

EXT. GARDEN OF CONVENT SCHOOL - DAY

The garden is filled with the parents and siblings of the convent students. Christina and several of her classmates that we've seen in previous scenes are wearing caps and gowns. They stand in a cluster near a platform that has been erected in front of rows of folding chairs which are still empty. Further down in the garden, the guests drink punch and stand in groups and talk. Christina's eyes roam the crowd anxiously, looking for her mother.

EXT. PEPSI BOTTLING PLANT - SAME TIME

INTERCUT:

Joan and Al are surrounded by hundreds of people and dozens of reporters. They are behind a red ribbon which is stretched across the entrance to the plant. Joan is wearing a well-tailored suit and a huge smile. She is in her element, the gracious star smiling benevolently on her subjects. Al stands beside her, enjoying the limelight as much as she does. He has a small poodle in his arms. It is wearing a coat of the same material as Joan's suit, with the monogram "C.C." Flashbulbs pop as Joan turns and gives Al a big smile and kiss. The crowd cheers and waves to her.

EXT. CONVENT GARDEN

INTERCUT:

The guests are taking seats in front of the stage. The first rows are filled with Christina and her classmates, who are in an energetic, festive mood. Christina sits stiffly as they giggle and whisper to each other around her. Their family members in the audience wave to some of them and chatter amongst themselves. Christina sits tall, trying to conceal her hurt feelings and pride. She looks nervously out into the crowd, scanning it to look for Joan and Al.

EXT. PEPSI PLANT - SAME TIME

INTERCUT:

A boring man in a boring suit is standing in front of a microphone. Joan and Al are beside him.

PLANT MANAGER

And now I have the honor of introducing a truly remarkable woman: one of the greatest movie stars of all time. Yet equally importantly she is also the devoted mother of adopted children, for whom she has made great personal sacrifices. A woman who has won the prestigious Woman of the Year Award for her extraordinary ability to have a flourishing career while achieving that greatest of accomplishments: motherhood. An inspiration to all American women, and our great privilege to have as a member of the Pepsi 'family,' the dedicated wife of our own wizard, Mr. Alfred Steele. Please welcome Miss Joan Crawford!

The crowd applauds, hoots, whistles. Joan beams with pleasure. The Plant Manager applauds and steps aside so Joan can come to the microphone.

JOAN

Thank you so much. It is a pleasure to be here, and to tell you that it has been hard, juggling a career and motherhood. But it was worth the sacrifice. Now I've got the greatest achievement of them all: a wonderful man and the opportunity to help him in his effort to make Pepsi number one.

Joan cuts the red ribbon.

EXT. CONVENT GARDEN - SAME TIME

INTERCUT:

Christina is being handed a blue ribbon by the Mother Superior. Most of the other students already stand on stage, holding the rolled diplomas they've been given.

CONTINUED:

MOTHER SUPERIOR
Winner of the English composition, graduating with honors and going on to Northwestern University; Christina Crawford. Congratulations.

Christina accepts the ribbon and diploma with a faint distracted smile. She continues to search the audience. Her POV of the two empty seats where her mother and Al were supposed to be.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CHRISTINA'S NEW YORK APARTMENT - MORNING (A FEW YEARS LATER)

Christina is reading the newspaper and drinking coffee. Her roommate, STEFFIE, does sit-ups on the floor in front of a morning television news show. The DOORBELL RINGS. Christina gets up to answer it.

CHRISTINA
(calling out)
Who is it?

DECORATOR (V.O.)
Delivery for Christina Crawford:

Christina opens the door and a small, wiry DECORATOR walks in, pulling a wheeled container that is full of plastic ivy. He is an elflike man, full of nervous energy, who starts unpacking a tool kit. Christina watches him for a moment, wondering what's going on.

CHRISTINA
Hold on! What's this all about?

The Decorator takes the end of a long strand of green plastic ivy and pulls it out of the container.

DECORATOR
Everlasting ivy: never have to worry about watering, just dust twice a year.

STEFFIE
(sarcastic joking)
Did you win a game show, Tina, and pick the wrong door?

At this moment, Joan appears at the door to Christina's apartment.

CONTINUED:

She is bustling with energy and begins directing the Decorator after a brisk, distracted greeting to Christina and Steffie.

JOAN
Good morning, girls. I figured you'd both be up, getting ready for auditions.
(to Decorator)
Okay, Jacob, let's start with a long strand there under the window, they we'll carry it on up the wall.
(back to "girls")
You really needed some greenery to liven this place up, and this is so much more convenient than live plants.

Joan goes over to correct what the Decorator is doing. Christina and Steffie turn to each other with mugging expressions that imply "This is too much to be believed." They look like they're going to crack up laughing, but when Joan turns back to them they instantly wipe the expressions off their faces and smile at Joan demurely.

JOAN
(continuing)
I'm sorry I can't stay, but I have such a busy schedule. Still, a mother must find time.

CHRISTINA
Thank you, Mommie dearest.

Christina kisses her good bye. Joan turns to Steffie on her way out the door.

JOAN
I hear you just did a little commercial, Steffie, that's very nice.

STEFFIE
If the Royal Academy knew they'd trained me to sell dog food they'd shoot themselves. But thanks!

Joan is out the door. The two women turn to each other and bust up laughing. They turn to look at the progress of the long green snake of plastic leaves up their wall and they laugh even harder, collapsing in laughing hysterics.

INT. JOAN'S NEW YORK APARTMENT - EVENING

Christina is at the dinner table in Joan and Al's spacious apartment. There are masses of fresh flowers everywhere and spanking-clean white carpet throughout. A white-jacketed butler serves from a silver platter that has vegetables in the depression at one end, potatoes at the other end, and in the middle, slices of rare roast beef carved and lined up. The butler offers the platter to Christina. With a furtive glance towards her mother, Christina helps herself to the vegetables and potatoes and bypasses the dreaded meat. She speaks her line during this to take Joan's attention off her plate, but Joan is not paying attention to such details anymore anyway. Joan has a highball glass next to her plate and drinks from it frequently. Her mood is pleasant, the concerned mother.

CHRISTINA
Mommie, I've decided to go to
Hollywood. Try my luck out there.

JOAN
It's a tough town, Christina,
crawling with young girls like
you, all fighting for the few
lousy parts that come up.

AL
But Christina's got a special
prettiness. And you said yourself,
Joan, that she's talented.

JOAN
Of course she's talented, but that
doesn't have a cotton-picking thing
to do with getting a part. The
competition is ferocious.

CHRISTINA
But, Mommie, I know I can do it.
If I just stick with it, they'll
pick me, I'll get my chance.

Joan takes a long swallow from her drink, with an ironic, sad smile.

JOAN
My sweet little Tina. You don't have
any idea what an ugly business it
is; vile, vulgar, without humanity.
Even when they do choose you,, they
still treat you like something they
stepped in on the sidewalk.

CONTINUED:

AL
Now, Joan, it's not as if she's just one of the crowd. After all, she is Christina Crawford.

JOAN
Oh no. I'm not going to call people and make it easy. It's a miserable business, Christina Crawford, and if you want in you're going to have to fight your way in, like everyone else.

CHRISTINA
That's how I want it too, Mommie.

Joan and Christina smile at each other. They both sit tall and proud, the daughter the mirror-image of the mother.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT EVENING

Christina gets up from the sofa in the all-white living room, which has plastic covers on all the furniture and lampshades. Christina is in stocking feet, as are Al and Joan, who still has her vodka glass near at hand. Joan and Al follow Christina across the white carpet to the line-up of their shoes at the entrance to the room. Christina steps into her shoes and kisses Joan and Al good night.

CHRISTINA
Thank you for a lovely evening.

JOAN
Give them hell in Hollywood, sweetheart.

AL
We'll be rooting for you.

Christina leaves. Joan and Al walk into the bedroom. He has a worried expression. His manner is cautious in the following interchange, a man doing an unpleasant but necessary task.

INT. BEDROOM

AL
Joan, I hate to have to bring this up, but you've got to cut back on your spending.

CONTINUED:

JOAN
(angry)
What are you talking about? Everything I've done is for you, worked my ass off to turn this into a showplace.

AL
You've done a marvelous job, but now we've got to pull back. I know we need the cook and Reggie and Ada, naturally. But maybe you could do without some other extravagances such as the lady's maid to unpack for you when we travel?

JOAN
(blows up)
I've lived a certain way all my life and I'm not going back down the ladder just because you want to pinch pennies! Besides, most of those trips we take for _your_ company; I have to look great for Pepsi-Cola.

AL
I want you to look great and enjoy yourself, but there's a limit. Our florist bill last month was almost two thousand dollars, with new flowers every day. We're going into debt.

JOAN
You're going into debt. You're the businessman, Alfred Steele, I'm the star. You wanted a movie star to trot around for your goddammed soda pop, well you've got to pay the price.

AL
Be reasonable, Joan. I've given you everything you've wanted. Just look at this place!

JOAN
Don't look at me, work something out. You're the genius of the soft drink world.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

JOAN (CONT'D)
Get the fucking company to pay the bills. Without me, Pepsi wouldn't get the time of day in the press.

AL
Joan, you've got to understand. It's a public company, for crissake. This isn't Hollywood, where someone 'takes care of things' with one phone call. This is the real world, it's different.

JOAN
I have a public: they expect me to live a certain way.

AL
And that way is breaking my back.

JOAN
You should have thought of all this before. There's no reason for me to have to suffer because you didn't plan things well. You'll find a solution, Al. You love challenges, after all.

INT. PEPSI BOARDROOM - DAY

Joan, dressed in black with a black veiled hat, sits at one end of a long boardroom table. On both sides of the gleaming mahogany table, is a long line of TWELVE EXECUTIVES, the board of directors of Pepsi. Joan's manner is that of the suffering, saintly widow; they are treating her accordingly.

EXECUTIVE #1
The condolences of every person at Pepsi Cola are with you.

EXECUTIVE #2
Al Steele helped make this company what it is today.

EXECUTIVE #1
And in later years you were right by his side, sharing the burdens and joys.

Joan bows her head, nodding and holding back tears. There is a beat as the men look at her with sympathetic concern.

CONTINUED:

EXECUTIVE #3
And we want to give you ample time to repay the debt.

Joan's head snaps up out of its mourning pose. She fixes the man with a cold stare. His tone remains cool, aloof, oily.

EXECUTIVE #3
(continuing)
Of course we'll have to take the Fifth Avenue apartment, but you probably didn't want to stay there alone now anyway.

Joan looks at each of the men slowly. A snarling smile begins to form as she swivels her head to include each of them. She conducts herself like a reigning mobster who is being challenged by lesser mafiosi.

JOAN
(calmly)
What debt? I've got a quarter of a million in stock.

EXECUTIVE #4
(referring to papers)
Your husband borrowed against the stock to pay for the construction on your apartment.

EXECUTIVE #2
And we loaned him a considerable sum in addition, to meet expenses his salary didn't cover.

Joan laughs out loud, a harsh mocking laugh.

JOAN
You think you're so clever, trying to sweep the poor little widow under the carpet? Think again: I'm on the board of directors of this lousy company.

Joan smiles arrogantly at them. They look back at her unperturbed, no emotions visible. Her anger begins here and builds throughout.

EXECUTIVE #4
We assumed that with your husband gone you'd no longer want to be on the board.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOAN
Bullshit. I've given years of my life to this company and I intend to stay with it.

EXECUTIVE #1
We appreciate your devotion and contribution, Miss Crawford, but we have retired you from the board of directors.

JOAN
You two-bit sons of bitches: you drove Al Steele to his grave and now you're going to stab me in the back? Forget it. I fought monsters worse than you years ago in Hollywood. I learned how to win the hard way.

EXECUTIVE #3
(placating)
Miss Crawford, we don't want any hard feelings, and of course...

JOAN
(interrupting)
You don't know what 'hard feelings' are until you see how few people in America will drink that shit of yours if I come out against it.

EXECUTIVE #3
(placating)
Please, Miss Crawford, it's hardly necessary to make threats you surely don't mean.

JOAN
Don't fuck with me, fellas. This ain't my first time at the rodeo. I've ridden some mean broncos before, and I'd be delighted to use you to even the score with all of them.

The men all look nervously at each other.

EXECUTIVE #2
We didn't realize the extent to which you were interested in the company, apart from Al's position. We misjudged, you could say.

CONTINUED:

Joan smiles at him. She includes the other three in her smirk.

JOAN
I feel better already, being reinstated on the board. Your mistake, of course, was in forgetting that the power of the press I delivered to Pepsi was my power. I can use it anyway I wish. It's a sword that cuts both ways, you might say.

CLOSE UP on Joan smiling malevolently, feeling her power.

INT. JOAN'S APARTMENT - LATE MORNING

Joan sits in front of the television, a bottle of vodka, an ice bucket and a glass beside her. She looks slightly frumpy, uncared-for. Several years have passed and she has not weathered them particularly well. She watches the soap opera with total concentration. The sound is turned down so low it is barely audible. There is something creepy about this woman sitting alone drinking in the semi-silence. Her expression changes as she watches. Christina has come on the screen and is involved in an intense scene with a man. She looks good. Joan's response is a mixture of envy and pride as she sits alone, watching her daughter in the spotlight.

INT. JOAN'S DINING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Joan is nicely dressed, fully made up, and still with a drink. Ada is organizing piles of publicity head shots of Joan on the table, and has lists of names, stamps, sponges and envelopes laid out. Joan is signing her name to each photograph, then passing it along to Ada. Joan is fully concentrated, taking her task most seriously. She reaches the bottom of the pile, takes a big sip from her nearby drink, and looks up.

JOAN
Ada, has Kramer brought my new photos?

ADA
Yes, Joan, he's been waiting in the den.

Ada goes to the doorway, calls out. Joan stretches and talks to herself, shaking her head.

CONTINUED:

JOAN
(martyred exhaustion)
It's a bottomless pit.

ADA
(calling out)
Mr. Kramer! We're ready now.

MR. KRAMER, a red-faced man in a safari jacket, enters with boxes of photographs. He sets them down on the table. Joan smiles up at him, opens the top box and takes a handful of photographs. She reacts to the picture of herself as if it was a monster. She looks back at the photographer with a disgusted indignation.

JOAN
Airbrush these lines out, you idiot! Are you trying to make me look like Grandma Moses?

MR. KRAMER
(halting)
I'm sorry. I thought you looked...

JOAN
Save your fucking realism for war coverage in Life magazine. I'm a movie star, Mr. Kramer.

CLOSE ON Joan glaring at the photographer. She looks every inch the imperious movie star; an aging movie star.

INT. "21" CLUB RESTAURANT - LUNCHTIME

Joan and Christina are lunching together. Joan is drinking throughout but is in a soft, communicative frame of mind.

JOAN
I'm proud of you, Christina. You're becoming a good little actress.

CHRISTINA
Thank you, Mommie dearest, I...

Christina chokes up. She can't talk for a moment. Praise from her mother has been rare. Joan smiles at her, then looks into the distance.

JOAN
Enjoy it while you can: the silver linings turn to clouds so fast in this business.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

JOAN (CONT'D)
One day they're tripping over themselves to get to you, the next they're kicking you in the teeth.

CHRISTINA
Is everything okay with you, Mommie? I worry.

JOAN
Worry about yourself, Christina. No one else will.

CHRISTINA
But now that you aren't working and you don't get out much, have you got enough to...

A middle-aged LADY interrupts them, handing a piece of paper and pen to Joan with eager apology.

LADY
I'm sorry to break in on your lunch, Miss Crawford, but you're one of my favorites. I'd just love an autograph.

JOAN
I'd be delighted. What is your name?

Joan signs the paper.

LADY
Bernice.

Joan hands it back to her with a gracious smile.

LADY
(continuing)
Oh thank you. You've made my trip to New York, Miss Crawford.

Joan smiles at the retreating woman for an instant, then turns to Christina.

JOAN
My darling, I'm so busy that going out to lunch throws off my whole schedule: there are fifteen hundred fans I correspond with regularly, never mind the new ones.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

JOAN (CONT'D)
Even though, as you point out, I haven't made a film in some time.

Christina gets flustered, afraid that she's insulted Joan.

CHRISTINA
I'm sorry. I didn't mean that...

JOAN
(interrupting nicely)
Not at all. I haven't worked because I haven't wanted to. All those years of breaking my back at five a.m., supporting you children. It's a relief, really. And I'm still busy with Pepsi.

CHRISTINA
Well, if there's any way I can help, let me know. I'm making good money on the TV show and...

JOAN
You hang onto it. I'm managing fine, now that I'm in the smaller apartment. Put your money in your mattress for your old age, Tina.

Christina and Joan smile at each other. Christina holds up her glass and clicks it against Joan's, a toast to their closeness.

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO - DAY

Christina and the actor we saw her with when Joan was watching the show are sitting on a couch on a cheap-looking soap opera TV set. Christina's head is bowed, she is brimming with emotion, and the actor looks at her with a worried expression. The DIRECTOR, wearing faded blue jeans and running shoes, watches from the side. It is a rehearsal.

DIRECTOR
That was terrific!

Christina looks up, comes out of character and smiles. The actor pats her on the knee and gives an appreciative smile and a "thumbs-up" motion.

CONTINUED:

DIRECTOR
(continuing)
Beautiful, Christina, just lovely.

Christina stands up, her smile fades. She puts her hand to her stomach with a pained expression, then tries to ignore the pain.

CHRISTINA
Thank you, Marty, it felt good.
Now what about when Sylvester
finds them later? Does she...

Christina breaks off in mid-sentence and collapses back onto the sofa. She is in intense pain and curls into a fetal position. The actor bends over her and the Director rushes over.

INT. HOSPITAL OPERATING ROOM

Christina is unconscious, lying on a hospital gurney and being wheeled into an operating room. There is activity all around her, nurses and orderlies readying for emergency surgery. One NURSE calls to another, who is laying out sterilized supplies.

NURSE
It's an appendix. He'll want two
abdominal preps.

INT. CHRISTINA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING (SEVERAL DAYS LATER)

Christina is lying in bed with intravenous tubes in her arm. Every available surface of the room is crowded with floral arrangements and flowering plants. She is quite pale and is tilted, sitting up with pillows propping her. She is dozing slightly as she watches a game show on television. A NURSE rushes in and switches the channel.

NURSE
Your TV show's on: don't you want
to watch?

CHRISTINA
(joking)
To see how well they manage without
me?

NURSE
To see your mother!
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

NURSE (CONT'D)
They just announced she's taking over your part until you're well.

CHRISTINA
What?! My character is twenty-eight years old.

The commercial on the station finishes and Joan appears on the screen. She is clearly drunk. She looks disoriented, searching for the cue cards, slurring her words. Christina turns whiter than she was before and stares in horrified fascination as her mother walks across the room shakily.

JOAN
(on TV)
Bill, I... uh... could you, uh...

ACTOR
(on TV; covering for her)
Could I call Cindy for you?

The CAMERA GOES "INSIDE" the television screen and we are on the set of the soap opera, which is being filmed live. The crew stands around the set, looking at each other with nervous embarrassment.

JOAN
(in character)
Yes, she wants... uh...

Joan squints at the cue card underneath the television camera. The Actor covers for her again.

ACTOR
I know that she wants to marry Bill. But what about his wife?

Corny soap opera MUSIC comes up and the red light goes off on top of the television camera. The Director we saw praising Christina hurries over to Joan, trying to be diplomatic while under terrible strain.

DIRECTOR
Do you want to jump to the next scene, and finish this one tomorrow?

JOAN
No no, I'm fine. Just nerves. Get me a little drink and I'll be fine.

CONTINUED:

Joan doesn't even realize how bad off she is. Her slurred words and fogged perceptions indicate that she's been drinking.

DIRECTOR
We've only got another seventy seconds here, Joan and you're having trouble with the cue cards as it is.

JOAN
Just hold them up a little higher, I couldn't see the damn things.

Joan's attitude is not one of anger, but of a liquor-induced self-assurance. All the crew members and other cast look anxiously amongst themselves as they listen to her and see how drunk she is.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
In ten please: ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one...

As he counts, the CAMERA PULLS BACK and RE-ENTERS Christina's hospital room, where she is once again watching Joan on the television screen.

INT. CHRISTINA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - SAME TIME

Christina looks at the image of her mother on the screen. Christina winces in embarrassment and humiliation. She covers her face with the hand that isn't held down by the intravenous.

CHRISTINA
(to Nurse)
Shut it off. Please.

INT. JOAN'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Time has passed, Joan looks sickly. She has lost weight and is pale. She sits alone at a large dining room table. A small portable television is next to her and she is watching a soap opera intently. A uniformed butler, the same one from the dinner scene when Al Steele was alive, carries in an attractively set breakfast tray. There is an embroidered tray mat, with a plate of raw ground meat on it. There is a highball glass, a small ice-bucket, and a bottle of Smirnoff 100 proof vodka.

CONTINUED:

The butler sets the tray down; Joan doesn't take her eyes off the TV screen. The butler measures out five silver jiggers of vodka, pouring each one into the glass, then adding ice cubes with a pair of silver tongs. He unfolds the linen napkin and places it in Joan's lap. When he does this she looks up at him with a nod of her head and then takes out her checkbook. The butler hands her a pen -- this is a long-established ritual. Joan makes out a check to him, tears it off and hands it to him. She takes a sip of her vodka as he pockets the pen and check.

JOAN
Thank you, Reggie. See you tomorrow.

REGGIE
Thank you. Have a good day, Miss
Crawford.

Reggie leaves the dining room. Joan takes another sip of her drink, turns the channel and watches for a moment. Christina is on the screen. Joan fiddles with the knobs, adjusting the reception, squinting her eyes. She sits back, sprinkles salt all over the mound of raw meat, and takes a bite, never taking her eyes from the set.

INT. "21" CLUB RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Eight people sit around the table, with Joan at the head. There is a birthday cake with lit candles in front of her. Christina is there with an ESCORT, Ada and another aging lady sit on the other side of Joan, then there is DR. CANTOR and two middle-aged gay men. Joan looks gaunt and weak but her spirits are good.

CHRISTINA
Here's to the birthday girl;
health and happiness.

Everyone raises his glass and drinks, AD LIBBING their good wishes.

DR. CANTOR
It's been lovely, but I'm afraid I
have to make rounds now.

He gets up from the table, kisses Joan goodbye. Christina stands.

CHRISTINA
Let me walk you out.

CONTINUED:

As they reach the stairs which lead down to the exit, Christina looks worried and speaks in a conspiratorial whisper.

CHRISTINA
(continuing)
I'm so worried about her health, Doctor.

DR. CANTOR
She's doing as well as can be hoped, considering that she refuses medication.

CHRISTINA
But she's drinking so much. She already had that bad fall, and living alone...

They have reached the bottom of the stairs and he interrupts her, putting his hand paternally on her shoulder.

DR. CANTOR
(interrupting)
There's nothing anyone can do, Christina. Your mother is a very strong woman. I don't suppose I have to tell you that?

Christina shakes her head. They exchange a sympathetic smile.

CHRISTINA
It would be so awful to lose her now, just when we're getting close. I wish there was something I could do for her. I feel so helpless.

DR. CANTOR
You're doing all you can, Christina. You're there if your mother needs you, and you love her. What more is there?

Christina smiles and gives a self-effacing shrug. She shakes his hand and gives him a grateful, relieved smile.

INT. FLOWER SHOP - DAY

Christina is inside a Madison Avenue florist. There are posters on the wall proclaiming "MOTHER'S DAY" and "TELL HER WITH FLOWERS."

CONTINUED:

Several of the be-ribboned plants and floral arrangements have "MOTHER'S DAY" cards on them. Christina is standing in front of the sliding glass doors that display cut flowers. The FLORIST is an effeminate man, dressed impeccably, with a very short haircut. He opens the glass doors and pulls out a handful of long-stemmed irises and calla lilies.

FLORIST
Aren't these divine together?

CHRISTINA
They're beautiful. Can you put
some greens with them?

FLORIST
Leave it to me: your mother will be
knocked out by what I'll put together.

They walk over to the counter together. The Florist takes out an order pad.

CHRISTINA
It goes to Joan Crawford...

He starts to write, then stops and looks up.

FLORIST
The Joan Crawford?

Christina nods, slightly self-conscious.

FLORIST
(continuing)
Your mother is Joan Crawford?!

He shakes his head, impressed and amazed.

FLORIST
(continuing)
I always loved her.

There is a slight beat as he turns his attention back to the flowers, writing down the price on the order form. Christina delivers her line quietly, with an ambiguous irony to it.

CHRISTINA
Everyone does.

INT. JOAN'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Joan is propped up in bed, with pillows all around.

CONTINUED:

Ada carries in the irises and calla lilies and puts them on a table. Joan looks up from the gossip magazine she's been reading. Ada hands her the card that came with the flowers.

ADA
Aren't they lovely?

Joan opens and reads the card. She looks pleased, touched. Her hand is shaking and she has barely any strength at all. Her voice is dreamy and gentle, as though she is not quite there.

JOAN
From my Tina...

INT. FUNERAL HOME - MORNING

Christina is alone in a private visiting room. In the middle is a highly polished coffin, closed. Christina stands near it, looking down at it. She tentatively reaches out and touches it. Her hand relaxes on the smooth shining wood. She rubs her hand along it with a soft sweeping motion. She repeats the motion, as though stroking an animal. She begins to cry. She caresses the coffin again, which further loosens her inhibitions and she cries more. She talks through her tears.

CHRISTINA
I always loved you.
(beat)
I know you loved me too, but...

Christina breaks down in sobs, then contains herself.

CHRISTINA
(continuing)
I hope you find peace. I love you, Mommie dearest.

INT. LAWYER'S OFFICE - DAY

Christina, wearing a dark suit, sits next to a handsome young man, her brother Christopher. On the other side of the desk from them is a LAWYER. He turns the pages of a document. Christina and Christopher watch him. Christopher turns towards Christina and catches her eye. She glances over at him and he gives her a comforting smile. She smiles in return, a nervous smile with tears brimming. The Lawyer stops turning pages and stares at the page in front of him.

CONTINUED:

LAWYER
Here we are: this is the section pertaining to you and Christopher.

Christina and Christopher look furtively at each other again while the Lawyer looks over the page. There is tension, anticipation.

LAWYER
(continuing; reading)
'It is my intention to make no provision herein for my daughter, Christina and my son, Christopher for reasons which are well known to them.'

Christina and Christopher turn towards each other with a snap of their necks, shocked expressions on their faces.

CLOSEUP

ON Christina's stunned, disbelieving, pained expression.

FREEZE FRAME.

END CREDITS.